LIBRARY OF PRINCETON
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

BS
491
.M16
1959
v. 1

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025 with funding from
Princeton Theological Seminary Library

https://archive.org/details/expositionsofhol01macl_0

LIBRARY OF
OCT [illegible] 1962
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Maclaren's

EXPOSITIONS
of
HOLY SCRIPTURE

by

ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D.D., Litt.D.

Volume 1

Genesis, Exodus,
Leviticus, Numbers,
Deuteronomy, Joshua,
Judges, Ruth, I Samuel

WM. B. EERDMANS PUBLISHING COMPANY
Grand Rapids 1959 Michigan

"It is difficult to believe that Dr. Maclaren's EXPOSITIONS will ever be superseded. Will there ever again be such a combination of spiritual insight, of scholarship, of passion, of style, of keen intellectual power? He was clearly a man of genius. So long as preachers care to teach from the Scriptures, they will find him their best guide and help. We shall not see his like again." — W. Robertson Nicoll, D.D., LL.D., Editor of *The Expositor's Bible* and *The Expositor's Greek Testament,* in *The British Weekly.*

"For 50 years he (Maclaren) continued as a Bible preacher, and in the midst of that period he began to be called the 'Prince of Expositors.' Perhaps, apart from Spurgeon and Moody, no man has had his sermons read by as many people as this great but plain preacher. Maclaren should be in every preacher's library. Read Maclaren to see expository preaching at its best." —Dr. Will H. Houghton in *The Moody Monthly,* Jan., 1938.

"Maclaren's EXPOSITIONS are the monumental work of a great preacher and thinker. The pastor who owns a set of these volumes will find here a wealth of material to enrich his own mind and heart in preparation for preaching; and the Sabbath School teacher who can consult them will be well equipped as he faces his class. The set would be a valuable addition to the library of any church, Bible institute or college." — *The Sunday School Times,* Nov. 5, 1938.

"Maclaren has been at my side for twenty years. If one is devoting his life to preaching, then he certainly ought to have in his library this wonderful work by Maclaren of Manchester." — Dr. Wilbur M. Smith, editor of *Peloubet's Notes,* etc.

"I have always found that my own comfort and efficiency in preaching have been in direct proportion to the frequency and depth of daily communion with God. I know of no way in which we can do our work but (1) quiet fellowship with Him; (2) resolute keeping up of a student's habits, which needs some power of saying 'no'; (3) conscientious pulpit preparation. The secret of success in everything is trust in God and hard work." — *Maclaren.*

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

LIBRARY OF PRINCETON
OCT 15 1962
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt. D.

GENESIS

CONTENTS

PAGE

THE VISION OF CREATION (Genesis i. 26—ii.3) . . 1

HOW SIN CAME IN (Genesis iii. 1-15) . . .

EDEN LOST AND RESTORED (Genesis iii. 24; Revelation xxii. 14) 10

THE GROWTH AND POWER OF SIN (Genesis iv. 3-16) . 14

WHAT CROUCHES AT THE DOOR (Genesis iv. 7, R. V.) . 22

WITH, BEFORE, AFTER (Genesis v. 22; Genesis xvii. 1; Deuteronomy xiii. 4) 32

THE COURSE AND CROWN OF A DEVOUT LIFE (Genesis v. 24) 38

THE SAINT AMONG SINNERS (Genesis vi. 9-22) . . 48

'CLEAR SHINING AFTER RAIN' (Genesis viii. 1-22) . . 55

THE SIGN FOR MAN AND THE REMEMBRANCER FOR GOD (Genesis ix. 8-17) 63

PAGE

An Example of Faith (Genesis xii 1-9) . . . 66

Abram and the Life of Faith 73

Going Forth (Genesis xii. 5) 77

Coming In 80

The Man of Faith (Genesis xii. 6, 7) . . . 82

Life in Canaan (Genesis xii. 8). . . . 84

The Importance of a Choice (Genesis xiii 1-13) . . 85

Abram the Hebrew (Genesis xiv. 13) . . . 93

God's Covenant with Abram (Genesis xv. 5-18) . . 101

The Word that Scatters Fear (Genesis xv. 1) . . 111

Faith and Righteousness (Genesis vx. 6) . . 116

Waiting Faith Rewarded and Strengthened by New Revelations (Genesis xvii. 1-9) . . . 117

A Petulant Wish (Genesis xvii. 18) . . . 123

'Because of His Importunity' (Genesis xviii. 16-33) . 129

PAGE

THE INTERCOURSE OF GOD AND HIS FRIEND . . 134

THE SWIFT DESTROYER (Genesis xix 15-26) . . 142

FAITH TESTED AND CROWNED (Genesis xxii. 1-14) . . 152

THE CROWNING TEST AND TRIUMPH OF FAITH . . 161

JEHOVAH-JIREH (Genesis xxii. 14). . . . 165

GUIDANCE IN THE WAY (Genesis xxiv. 27) . . 173

THE DEATH OF ABRAHAM (Genesis xxv. 8) . . 180

A BAD BARGAIN (Genesis xxv. 27-34) . . . 192

POTTAGE *versus* BIRTHRIGHT (Genesis xxv. 34) . . 198

THE FIRST APOSTLE OF PEACE AT ANY PRICE (Genesis xxvi. 12-25) 201

THE HEAVENLY PATHWAY AND THE EARTHLY HEART (Genesis xxviii. 10-22) 206

MAHANAIM: THE TWO CAMPS (Genesis xxxii. 1). . 214

THE TWOFOLD WRESTLE — GOD'S WITH JACOB AND JACOB'S WITH GOD (Genesis xxxii. 9-12) . . . 222

A FORGOTTEN VOW (Genesis xxxv. 1) . . . 233

PAGE
The Trials and Visions of Devout Youth (Genesis xxxvii. 1-11) 234
Man's Passions and God's Purpose (Genesis xxxvii. 23-36) 240
Goodness in a Dungeon (Genesis xl. 1-15) . . 248
Joseph, the Prime Minister (Genesis xli. 38-48). . 253
Recognition and Reconciliation (Genesis xlv. 1-15) . 260
Joseph, the Pardoner and Preserver . . . 268
Growth by Transplanting (Genesis xlvii. 1-12). . 272
Two Retrospects of One Life (Genesis xlvii. 9; Genesis xlviii. 15, 16) 279
'The Hands of the Mighty God of Jacob' (Genesis xlix. 23, 24) 286
The Shepherd, the Stone of Israel (Genesis xlix. 24) . 295
A Calm Evening, promising a Bright Morning (Genesis 1. 14-26) 305
Joseph's Faith (Genesis 1. 25) 311
A Coffin in Egypt (Genesis 1. 26) . . . 328

THE VISION OF CREATION

'And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in His own image: in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them. And God blessed them: and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so. And God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

'Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made.'—Genesis i. 26—ii. 3.

We are not to look to Genesis for a scientific cosmogony, and are not to be disturbed by physicists' criticisms on it as such. Its purpose is quite another, and far more important; namely, to imprint deep and ineffaceable the conviction that the one God created all things. Nor must it be forgotten that this vision of creation was given to people ignorant of natural science, and prone to fall back into surrounding idolatry. The comparison of the creation narratives in Genesis with the cuneiform tablets, with which they evidently are most closely connected, has for its most important result the demonstration of the infinite elevation above their monstrosities and puerilities, of this solemn, steadfast attribution of the creative act to the one God. Here we can only draw out in brief the main points which the narrative brings into prominence.

1. The revelation which it gives is the truth, obscured to all other men when it was given, that one God 'in the beginning created the heaven and the earth.' That solemn utterance is the keynote of the whole. The rest but expands it. It was a challenge and a denial for all the beliefs of the nations, the truth of which Israel was the champion and missionary. It swept the heavens and earth clear of the crowd of gods, and showed the One enthroned above, and operative in, all things. We can scarcely estimate the grandeur, the emancipating power, the all-uniting force, of that utterance. It is a worn commonplace to us. It was a strange, thrilling novelty when it was written at the head of this narrative. *Then* it was in sharp opposition to beliefs that have long been dead to us; but it is still a protest against some living errors. Physical science has not spoken the final word when it has shown us how things came to be as they are. There remains the deeper question, What, or who, originated and guided the processes? And the only answer is the ancient declaration, 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.'

2. The record is as emphatic and as unique in its teaching as to the mode of creation: 'God said . . . and it was so.' That lifts us above all the poor childish myths of the nations, some of them disgusting, many of them absurd, all of them unworthy. There was no other agency than the putting forth of the divine will. The speech of God is but a symbol of the flashing forth of His will. To us Christians the antique phrase suggests a fulness of meaning not

inherent in it, for we have learned to believe that 'all things were made by Him' whose name is 'The Word of God'; but, apart from that, the representation here is sublime. 'He spake, and it was done'; that is the sign-manual of Deity.

3. The completeness of creation is emphasised. We note, not only the recurrent 'and it was so,' which declares the perfect correspondence of the result with the divine intention, but also the recurring 'God saw that it was good.' His ideals are always realised. The divine artist never finds that the embodiment of His thought falls short of His thought.

> 'What act is all its thought had been?
> What will but felt the fleshly screen?

But He has no hindrances nor incompletenesses in His creative work, and the very sabbath rest with which the narrative closes symbolises, not His need of repose, but His perfect accomplishment of His purpose. God ceases from His works because 'the works were finished,' and He saw that all was very good.

4. The progressiveness of the creative process is brought into strong relief. The work of the first four days is the preparation of the dwelling-place for the living creatures who are afterwards created to inhabit it. How far the details of these days' work coincide with the order as science has made it out, we are not careful to ask here. The primeval chaos, the separation of the waters above from the waters beneath, the emergence of the land, the beginning of vegetation there, the shining out of the sun as the dense mists cleared, all find confirmation even in modern theories of evolution. But the intention of the whole is much rather to teach that, though the simple utterance of

the divine will was the agent of creation, the manner of it was not a sudden calling of the world, as men know it, into being, but majestic, slow advance by stages, each of which rested on the preceding. To apply the old distinction between justification and sanctification, creation was a work, not an act. The Divine Workman, who is always patient, worked slowly then as He does now. Not at a leap, but by deliberate steps, the divine ideal attains realisation.

5. The creation of living creatures on the fourth and fifth days is so arranged as to lead up to the creation of man as the climax. On the fifth day sea and air are peopled, and their denizens 'blessed,' for the equal divine love holds every living thing to its heart. On the sixth day the earth is replenished with living creatures. Then, last of all, comes man, the apex of creation. Obviously the purpose of the whole is to concentrate the light on man; and it is a matter of no importance whether the narrative is correct according to zoology, or not. What it says is that God made all the universe, that He prepared the earth for the delight of living creatures, that the happy birds that soar and sing, and the dumb creatures that move through the paths of the seas, and the beasts of the earth, are all His creating, and that man is linked to them, being made on the same day as the latter, and by the same word, but that between man and them all there is a gulf, since he is made in the divine image. That image implies personality, the consciousness of self, the power to say 'I,' as well as purity. The transition from the work of the first four days to that of creating living things must have had a break. No theory has been able to bridge the

chasm without admitting a divine act introducing the new element of life, and none has been able to bridge the gulf between the animal and human consciousness without admitting a divine act introducing 'the image of God' into the nature common to animal and man. Three facts as to humanity are thrown up into prominence: its possession of the image of God, the equality and eternal interdependence of the sexes, and the lordship over all creatures. Mark especially the remarkable wording of verse 27: 'created He *him*; male and female created He *them*.' So 'neither is the woman without the man, nor the man without the woman.' Each is maimed apart from the other. Both stand side by side, on one level before God. The germ of the most 'advanced' doctrines of the relations of the sexes is hidden here.

HOW SIN CAME IN

'Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know, that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened; and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat; and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And He said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? And the man said, The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the Lord God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? and the woman said, The serpent beguiled me. and I did eat. And the Lord God said unto the

serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field: upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life. And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.'—GENESIS iii. 1-15.

IT is no part of my purpose to enter on the critical questions connected with the story of 'the fall.' Whether it is a legend, purified and elevated, or not, is of less consequence than what is its moral and religious significance, and that significance is unaffected by the answer to the former question. The story presupposes that primitive man was in a state of ignorant innocence, not of intellectual or moral perfection, and it tells how that ignorant innocence came to pass into conscious sin. What are the stages of the transition?

1. There is the presentation of inducement to evil. The law to which Adam is to be obedient is in the simplest form. There is restriction. 'Thou shalt not' is the first form of law, and it is a form congruous with the undeveloped, though as yet innocent, nature ascribed to him. The conception of duty is present, though in a very rudimentary shape. An innocent being may be aware of limitations, though as yet not 'knowing good and evil.' With deep truth the story represents the first suggestion of disobedience as presented from without. No doubt, it might have by degrees arisen from within, but the thought that it was imported from another sphere of being suggests that it is alien to true manhood, and that, if brought in from without, it may be cast out again. And the temptation had a personal source. There are beings who desire to draw men away from God. The serpent, by its poison and its loathly form, is the natural symbol of such an enemy of man. The insinuating slyness of the suggestions of evil is like the sinuous gliding of the snake, and truly represents the

process by which temptation found its way into the hearts of the first pair, and of all their descendants. For it begins with casting a doubt on the reality of the prohibition. 'Hath God said?' is the first parallel opened by the besieger. The fascinations of the forbidden fruit are not dangled at first before Eve, but an apparently innocent doubt is filtered into her ear. And is not that the way in which we are still snared? The reality of moral distinctions, the essential wrongness of the sin, is obscured by a mist of sophistication. 'There is no harm in it' steals into some young man's or woman's mind about things that were forbidden at home, and they are half conquered before they know that they have been attacked. Then comes the next besieger's trench, much nearer the wall—namely, denial of the fatal consequences of the sin: 'Ye shall not surely die,' and a base hint that the prohibition was meant, not as a parapet to keep from falling headlong into the abyss, but as a barrier to keep from rising to a great good; 'for God doth know, that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods.' These are still the two lies which wile us to sin: 'It will do you no harm,' and 'You are cheating yourselves out of good by not doing it.'

2. Then comes the yielding to the tempter. As long as the prohibition was undoubted, and the fatal results certain, the fascinations of the forbidden thing were not felt. But as soon as these were tampered with, Eve saw 'that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes.' So it is still. Weaken the awe-inspiring sense of God's command, and of the ruin that follows the breach of it, and the heart of man is like a city without walls, into which any enemy can march unhindered. So long

as God's 'Thou shalt not, lest thou die,' rings in the ears, the eyes see little beauty in the sirens that sing and beckon. But once that awful voice is deadened, they charm, and allure to dally with them.

In the undeveloped condition of primitive man temptation could only assail him through the senses and appetites, and its assault would be the more irresistible because reflection and experience were not yet his. But the act of yielding was, as sin ever is, a deliberate choice to please self and disobey God. The woman's more emotional, sensitive, compliant nature made her the first victim, and her greatest glory, her craving to share her good with him whom she loves, and her power to sway his will and acts, made her his temptress. 'As the husband is, the wife is,' says Tennyson; but the converse is even truer: As the wife is, the man is.

3. The fatal consequences came with a rush. There is a gulf between being tempted and sinning, but the results of the sin are closely knit to it. They come automatically, as surely as a stream from a fountain. The promise of knowing good and evil was indeed kept, but instead of its making the sinners 'like gods,' it showed them that they were like beasts, and brought the first sense of shame. To know evil was, no doubt, a forward step intellectually; but to know it by experience, and as part of themselves, necessarily changed their ignorant innocence into bitter knowledge, and conscience awoke to rebuke them. The first thing that their opened eyes saw was themselves, and the immediate result of the sight was the first blush of shame. Before, they had walked in innocent unconsciousness, like angels or infants; now they had knowledge of good and evil, because their sin had

made evil a part of themselves, and the knowledge was bitter.

The second consequence of the fall is the disturbed relation with God, which is presented in the highly symbolical form fitting for early ages, and as true and impressive for the twentieth century as for them. Sin broke familiar communion with God, turned Him into a 'fear and a dread,' and sent the guilty pair into ambush. Is not that deeply and perpetually true? The sun seen through mists becomes a lurid ball of scowling fire. The impulse is to hide from God, or to get rid of thoughts of Him. And when He *is* felt to be near, it is as a questioner, bringing sin to mind. The shuffling excuses, which venture even to throw the blame of sin on God ('the woman whom *Thou* gavest me'), or which try to palliate it as a mistake ('the serpent beguiled me'), have to come at last, however reluctantly, to confess that 'I' did the sin. Each has to say, 'I did eat.' So shall we all have to do. We may throw the blame on circumstances, weakness of judgment, and the like, while here, but at God's bar we shall have to say, '*Mea* culpa, *mea* culpa.'

The curse pronounced on the serpent takes its habit and form as an emblem of the degradation of the personal tempter, and of the perennial antagonism between him and mankind, while even at that first hour of sin and retribution a gleam of hope, like the stray beam that steals through a gap in a thundercloud, promises that the conquered shall one day be the conqueror, and that the woman's seed, though wounded in the struggle, shall one day crush the poison-bearing, flat head in the dust, and end forever his power to harm. 'Known unto God are all his works from the beginning,' and the Christ was promised ere the gates of Eden were shut on the exiles.

EDEN LOST AND RESTORED

'So He drove out the man: and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubims and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.'—GENESIS iii. 24.

'Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.'

REVELATION xxii. 14.

'BETTER is the end of a thing than the beginning.' Eden was fair, but the heavenly city shall be fairer. The Paradise regained is an advance on the Paradise that was lost. These are the two ends of the history of man, separated by who knows how many millenniums. Heaven lay about him in his infancy, but as he journeyed westwards its morning blush faded into the light of common day—and only at eventide shall the sky glow again with glory and colour, and the western heaven at last outshine the eastern, with a light that shall never die. A fall, and a rise—a rise that reverses the fall, a rise that transcends the glory from which he fell,—that is the Bible's notion of the history of the world, and I, for my part, believe it to be true, and feel it to be the one satisfactory explanation of what I see round about me and am conscious of within me.

1. *Man had an Eden and lost it.*

I take the Fall to be a historical fact. To all who accept the authority of Scripture, no words are needed beyond the simple statement before us, but we may just gather up the signs that there are on the wide field of the world's history, and in the narrower experience of individuals, that such a fall has been.

Look at the condition of the world: its degradation, its savagery—all its pining myriads, all its untold millions who sit in darkness and the shadow of death. Will any man try to bring before him the actual state of the heathen world, and, retaining his belief in a God, profess that these men are what God meant men to be? It seems to me that the present condition of the world is not congruous with the idea that men are in their primitive state, and if this is what God meant men for, then I see not how the dark clouds which rest on His wisdom and His love are to be lifted off.

Then, again—if the world has not a Fall in its history, then we must take the lowest condition as the one from which all have come; and is that idea capable of defence? Do we see anywhere signs of an upward process going on now? Have we any experience of a tribe raising itself? Can you catch anywhere a race in the act of struggling up, outside of the pale of Christianity? Is not the history of all a history of decadence, except only where the Gospel has come in to reverse the process?

But passing from this: What mean the experiences of the individual—these longings; this hard toil; these sorrows?

How comes it that man alone on earth, manifestly meant to be leader, lord, etc., seems but cursed with a higher nature that he may know greater sorrows, and raised above the beasts in capacity that he may sink below them in woe, this capacity only leading to a more exquisite susceptibility, to a more various as well as more poignant misery?

Whence come the contrarieties and discordance in his nature?

It seems to me that all this is best explained as the Bible explains it by saying: (1) Sin has done it; (2) Sin is not part of God's original design, but man has fallen; (3) Sin had a personal beginning. There have been men who were pure, able to stand but free to fall.

It seems to me that that explanation is more in harmony with the facts of the case, finds more response in the unsophisticated instinct of man, than any other. It seems to me that, though it leaves many dark and sorrowful mysteries all unsolved, yet that it alleviates the blackest of them, and flings some rays of hope on them all. It seems to me that it relieves the character and administration of God from the darkest dishonour; that it delivers man's position and destiny from the most hopeless despair; that though it leaves the mystery of the origin of evil, it brings out into clearest relief the central truths that evil is evil, and sin and sorrow are not God's will; that it vindicates as something better than fond imaginings the vague aspirations of the soul for a fair and holy state; that it establishes, as nothing else will, at once the love of God and the dignity of man; that it leaves open the possibility of the final overthrow of that Sin which it treats as an intrusion and stigmatises as a fall; that it therefore braces for more vigorous, hopeful conflict against it, and that while but for it the answer to the despairing question, Hast Thou made all men in vain? must be either the wailing echo 'In vain,' or the denial that He has made them at all, there is hope and there is power. and there is brightness thrown on the character of God and on the fate of man, by the old belief that God made man upright, and that man made himself a sinner.

2. *Heaven restores the lost Eden.*

'God is not ashamed to be called their God, *for* He hath prepared them a *city*.'

The highest conception we can form of heaven is the reversal of all the evil of earth, and the completion of its incomplete good: the sinless purity—the blessed presence of God—the fulfilment of all desires—the service which is *blessed*, not toil—the changelessness which is progress, not stagnation.

3. *Heaven surpasses the lost Eden.*

(1) Garden—City.

The perfection of association—the *nations* of the saved. Here 'we mortal millions live alone,' even when united with dearest. Like Egyptian monks of old, each dwelling in his own cave, though all were a community.

(2) The richer experience.

The memory of past sorrows which are understood at last.

Heaven's bliss in contrast with earthly joys.

Sinlessness of those who have been sinners will be more intensely lustrous for its dark background in the past. Redeemed men will be brighter than angels.

The impossibility of a fall.

Death behind us.

The former things shall no more come to mind, being lost in blaze of present transcendent experience, but yet shall be remembered as having led to that perfect state.

Christ not only repairs the 'tabernacle which was fallen,' but builds a fairer temple. He brings 'a statelier Eden,' and makes us dwell for ever in a Garden City.

THE GROWTH AND POWER OF SIN

> 'And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel, and to his offering: But unto Cain, and to his offering, he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him. And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not. Am I my brother's keeper? And He said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto Me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand. When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength. A fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth. And Cain said unto the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, Thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from Thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth: and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me. And the Lord said unto him, Therefore, whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him. And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden.'
>
> GENESIS iv. 3-16.

MANY lessons crowd on us from this section. Its general purport is to show the growth of sin, and its power to part man from man even as it has parted man from God. We may call the whole 'The beginning of the fatal operations of sin on human society.'

1. The first recorded act of worship occasions the first murder. Is not that only too correct a forecast of the oceans of blood which have been shed in the name of religion, and a striking proof of the subtle power of sin to corrupt even the best, and out of it to make the worst? What a lesson against the bitter hatred which has too often sprung up on so-called religious grounds! No malice is so venomous, no hate so fierce, no cruelty so fiendish, as those which are fed and fanned by religion. Here is the first triumph of sin, that it poisons the very springs of worship, and

makes what should be the great uniter of men in sweet and holy bonds their great separator.

2. Sin here appears as having power to bar men's way to God. Much ingenuity has been spent on the question why Abel's offering was accepted and Cain's rejected. But the narrative itself shows in the words of Jehovah, 'If thou doest well, is there not acceptance?' that the reason lay in Cain's evil deeds. So, in 1 John iii. 12, the fratricide is put down to the fact that 'his works were evil, and his brother's righteous'; and Hebrews xi. 4 differs from this view only in making the ground of righteousness prominent, when it ascribes the acceptableness of Abel's offering to faith. Both these passages are founded on the narrative, and we need not seek farther for the reason of the different reception of the two offerings. Character, then, or, more truly, faith, which is the foundation of a righteous character, determines the acceptableness of worship. Cain's offering had no sense of dependence, no outgoing of love and trust, no adoration,—though it may have had fear,—and no moral element. So it had no sweet odour for God. Abel's was sprinkled with some drops of the incense of lowly trust, and came from a heart which fain would be pure; therefore it was a joy to God. So we are taught at the very beginning, that, as is the man, so is his sacrifice; that the prayer of the wicked is an abomination. Plenty of worship nowadays is Cain worship. Many reputable professing Christians bring just such sacrifices. The prayers of such never reach higher than the church ceiling. Of course, the lesson of the story is not that a man must be pure before his sacrifice is accepted. Of course, the faintest cry of trust is heard, and a contrite heart, however sinful, is always welcome. But we are

taught that our acts of worship must have our hearts in them, and that it is vain to pray and to love evil. Sin has the awful power of blocking our way to God.

3. Note in one word that we have here at the beginning of human history the solemn distinction which runs through it all. These two, so near in blood, so separate in spirit, head the two classes into which Scripture decisively parts men, especially men who have heard the gospel. It is unfashionable now to draw that broad line between the righteous and the wicked, believers and unbelievers. Sheep and goats are all one. Modern liberal sentiment—so-called—will not consent to such narrowness as the old-fashioned classification. There are none of us black, and none white; we are all different shades of grey. But facts do not quite bear out such amiable views. Perhaps it is not less charitable, and a great deal truer, to draw the line broad and plain, on one side of which is peace and safety, and on the other trouble and death, if only we make it plain that no man need stop one minute on the dark side.

4. The solemn divine voice reads the lesson of the power of sin, when once done, over the sinner. Like a wild beast, it crouches in ambush at his door, ready to spring and devour. The evil deed once committed takes shape, as it were, and waits to seize the doer. Remorse, inward disturbance, and above all, the fatal inclination to repeat sin till it becomes a habit, are set forth with terrible force in these grim figures. What a menagerie of ravenous beasts some of us have at the doors of our hearts! With what murderous longing they glare at us, seeking to fascinate us, and make us their prey! When we sin, we cannot escape the issues;

and every wrong thing we do has a kind of horrible life given it, and sits henceforth there, beside us, ready to rend us. The tempting, seducing power of our own evils was never put in more startling and solemnly true words, on which the bitter experience of many a poor victim of his own past is a commentary. The eternal duty of resistance is farther taught by the words. Hope of victory, encouragement to struggle, the assurance that even these savage beasts may be subdued, and the lion and adder (the hidden and the glaring evils—those which wound unseen, and which spring with a roar) may be overcome, led in a silken leash or charmed into harmlessness, are given in the command, which is also a promise, 'Rule thou over it.'

5. The deadly fruit of hate is taught us in the brief account of the actual murder. Notice the impressive plainness and fewness of the words. 'Cain rose up against his brother, and slew him.' A kind of horror-struck awe of the crime is audible. Observe the emphasis with which 'his brother' is repeated in the verse and throughout. Observe, also, the vivid light thrown by the story on the rise and progress of the sin. It begins with envy and jealousy. Cain was not wroth because his offering was rejected. What did he care for that? But what angered him was that his brother had what he had not. So selfishness was at the bottom, and that led on to envy, and that to hatred. Then comes a pause, in which God speaks remonstrances,—as God's voice—conscience—does now to us all,—between the imagination and the act of evil. A real or a feigned reconciliation is effected. The brothers go in apparent harmony to the field. No new provocation appears, but the old feelings, kept down for a time, come in again with a rush, and Cain is

swept away by them. Hatred left to work means murder. The heart is the source of all evil. Selfishness is the mother tincture out of which all sorts of sin can be made. Guard the thoughts, and keep down self, and the deeds will take care of themselves.

6. Mark how close on the heels of sin God's question treads! How God spoke, we know not. Doubtless in some fashion suited to the needs of Cain. But He speaks to us as really as to him, and no sooner is the rush of passion over, and the bad deed done, than a revulsion comes. What we call conscience asks the question in stern tones, which make a man's flesh creep. Our sin is like touching the electric bells which people sometimes put on their windows to give notice of thieves. As soon as we step beyond the line of duty we set the alarm going, and it wakens the sleeping conscience. Some of us go so far as to have silenced the voice within; but, for the most part, it speaks immediately after we have gratified our inclinations wrongly.

7. Cain's defiant answer teaches us how a man hardens himself against God's voice. It also shows us how intensely selfish all sin is, and how weakly foolish its excuses are. It is sin which has rent men apart from men, and made them deny the very idea that they have duties to all men. The first sin was only against God; the second was against God and man. The first sin did not break, though it saddened, human love; the second kindled the flames of infernal hatred, and caused the first drops to flow of the torrents of blood which have soaked the earth. When men break away from God, they will soon murder one another.

Cain was his brother's keeper. His question answered itself. If Abel was his brother, then he was bound to look after him. His self-condemning excuse is but a specimen of the shallow pleas by which the forgetfulness of duties we owe to all mankind, and all sins, are defended.

8. The stern sentence is next pronounced. First we have the grand figure of the innocent blood having a voice which pierces the heavens. That teaches in the most forcible way the truth that God knows the crimes done by 'man's inhumanity to man,' even when the meek sufferers are silent. According to the fine old legend of the cranes of Ibycus, a bird of the air will carry the matter. It speaks, too, of God's tender regard for His saints, whose blood is precious in His sight; and it teaches that He will surely requite. We cannot but think of the innocent blood shed on Calvary, of the Brother of us all, whose sacrifice was accepted of God. His blood, too, crieth from the ground, has a voice which speaks in the ear of God, but not to plead for vengeance, but pardon.

> 'Jesus' blood through earth and skies,
> Mercy, free, boundless mercy, cries.'

Then follows the sentence which falls into two parts—the curse of bitter, unrequited toil, and the doom of homeless wandering. The blood which has been poured out on the battlefield fertilises the soil; but Abel's blasted the earth. It was a supernatural infliction, to teach that bloodshed polluted the earth, and so to shed a nameless horror over the deed. We see an analogous feeling in the common belief that places where some foul sin has been committed are cursed. We see a weak natural correspondence in the devastating effect of war, as expressed in the old saying that no grass would grow where the hoof of the Turk's horse had stamped.

The doom of wandering, which would be compulsory by reason of the earth's barrenness, is a parable. The murderer is hunted from place to place, as the Greek fable has it, by the furies, who suffer him not to rest. Conscience drives a man 'through dry places, seeking rest, and finding none.' All sin makes us homeless wanderers. There is but one home for the heart, one place of repose for a man, namely, in the heart of God, the secret place of the Most High; and he who, for his sin, durst not enter there, is driven forth into 'a salt land and not inhabited,' and has to wander wearily there. The legend of the wandering Jew, and that other of the sailor, condemned for ever to fly before the gale through stormy seas, have in them a deep truth. The earthly punishment of departing from God is that we have not where to lay our heads. Every sinner is a fugitive and a vagabond. But if we love God we are still wanderers indeed, but we are 'pilgrims and sojourners with Thee.'

9. Cain's remonstrance completes the tragic picture. We see in it despair without penitence. He has no word of confession. If he had accepted his chastisement, and learned by it his sin, all the bitterness would have passed away. But he only writhes in agony, and adds, to the sentence pronounced, terrors of his own devising. God had not forbidden him to come into His presence. But he feels that he dare not venture thither. And he was right; for, whether we suppose that some sensible manifestation of the divine presence is meant by 'Thy face' or no, a man who had unrepented sin on his conscience, and murmurings in his heart, could not hold intercourse with God; nor would he wish to do so. Thus we learn again the lesson that sin separates from our Father, and that chastisements,

not accepted as signs of His love, build up a black wall between God and us.

Nor had Cain been told that his life was in danger. But his conscience made a coward of him, as of us all, and told him what he deserved. There were, no doubt, many other children of Adam, who would be ready to avenge Abel's death. The wild justice of revenge is deep in the heart of men; and the natural impulse would be to hunt down the murderer like a wolf. It is a dreadful picture of the defiant and despairing sinner, tortured by well-founded fears, shut out from the presence of God, but not able to shut out thoughts of Him, and seeing an avenger in every man.

We need not ask how God set a mark on Cain. Enough that His doing so was a merciful alleviation of his lot, and teaches us how God's long-suffering spares life, and tempers judgment, that there may still be space for repentance. If even Cain has gracious protection and mercy blended with his chastisement, who can be beyond the pale of God's compassion, and with whom will not His loving providence and patient pity labour? No man is so scorched by the fire of retribution, but many a dewy drop from God's tenderness falls on him. No doubt, the story of the preservation of Cain was meant to restrain the blood-feuds so common and ruinous in early times; and we need the lesson yet, to keep us from vengeance under the mask of justice. But the deepest lesson and truest pathos of it lies in the picture of the watchful kindness of God lingering round the wretched man, like gracious sunshine playing on some scarred and black rock, to win him back by goodness to penitence, and through penitence to peace.

WHAT CROUCHES AT THE DOOR

'If thou doest not well, sin croucheth at the door: and unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.'—GENESIS iv. 7 (R. V.).

THESE early narratives clothe great moral and spiritual truths in picturesque forms, through which it is difficult for us to pierce. In the world's childhood God spoke to men as to children, because there were no words then framed which would express what we call abstract conceptions. They had to be shown by pictures. But these early men, simple and childlike as they were, had consciences; and one abstraction they did understand, and that was sin. They knew the difference between good and evil.

So we have here God speaking to Cain, who was wroth because of the rejection of his sacrifice; and in dim, enigmatical words setting forth the reason of that rejection. 'If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?' Then clearly his sacrifice was rejected because it was the sacrifice of an evil-doer. His description as such is given in the words of my text, which are hard for us to translate into our modern, less vivid and picturesque language. 'If thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door; and unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.' Strange as the words sound, if I mistake not, they convey some very solemn lessons, and if well considered, become pregnant with meaning.

The key to the whole interpretation of them is to remember that they describe what happens after, and because of, wrong-doing. They are all suspended on 'If thou doest not well.' Then, in that case, for the first thing—'sin lieth at the door.' Now the word translated here 'lieth' is employed only to express the *crouching* of an animal, and frequently of a wild animal. The picture, then, is of the wrong-doer's sin lying at his door there like a crouching tiger ready to spring, and if it springs, fatal. 'If thou doest not well, a wild beast crouches at thy door.'

Then there follow, with a singular swift transition of the metaphor, other words still harder to interpret, and which have been, as a matter of fact, interpreted in very diverse fashions. 'And unto thee shall be *its*' (I make that slight alteration upon our version) 'desire, and thou shalt rule over it.' Where did we hear these words before? They were spoken to Eve, in the declaration of her punishment. They contain the blessing that was embedded in the curse. 'Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.' The longing of the pure womanly heart to the husband of her love, and the authority of the husband over the loving wife—the source of the deepest joy and purity of earth, is transferred, by a singularly bold metaphor, to this other relationship, and, in horrible parody of the wedded union and love, we have the picture of the sin, that was thought of as crouching at the sinner's door like a wild beast, now, as it were, wedded to him. He is mated to it now, and it has a kind of tigerish, murderous desire after him, while he on his part is to subdue and control it.

The reference of these clauses to the sin which has just been spoken of involves, no doubt, a very bold figure, which has seemed to many readers too bold to be admissible, and the words have therefore been supposed to refer to Abel, who, as the younger brother, would be subordinate to Cain. But such a reference breaks the connection of the sentence, introduces a thought which is not a consequence of Cain's not doing well, has no moral bearing to warrant its appearance here, and compels us to travel an inconveniently long distance back in the context to find an antecedent to the 'his' and 'him' of our text. It seems to be more in consonance, therefore, with the archaic style of the whole narrative, and to yield a profounder and worthier meaning, if we recognise the boldness of the metaphor, and take 'sin' as the subject of the whole. Now all this puts in concrete, metaphorical shape, suited to the stature of the hearers, great and solemn truths. Let us try to translate them into more modern speech.

1. First think, then, of that wild beast which we tether to our doors by our wrong-doing.

We talk about 'responsibility' and 'guilt,' and 'consequences that never can be effaced,' and the like. And all these abstract and quasi-philosophical terms are implied in the grim, tremendous metaphor of my text 'If thou doest not well, a tiger, a wild beast, is crouching at thy door.' We are all apt to be deceived by the imagination that when an evil deed is done, it passes away and leaves no permanent results. The lesson taught the childlike primitive man here, at the beginning, before experience had accumulated instances which might demonstrate the solemn truth, was that every human deed is immortal, and that the transitory evil thought, or word, or act, which seems to fleet by like a cloud, has a permanent being, and hereafter haunts the life of the doer, as a real presence. If thou doest not well, thou dost create a horrible something which nestles beside thee henceforward. The momentary act is incarnated, as it were, and sits there at the doer's doorpost waiting for him; which being turned into less forcible but more modern language, is just this: every sin that a man does has perennial consequences, which abide with the doer for evermore.

I need not dwell upon illustrations of that to any length. Let me just run over two or three ways in which it is true. First of all, there is that solemn fact which we put into a long word that comes glibly off people's lips, and impresses them very little—the solemn fact of responsibility. We speak in common talk of such and such a thing lying at some one's door. Whether the phrase has come from this text I do not know. But it helps to illustrate the force of these words, and to suggest that they mean this, among other things, that we have to answer for every deed, however evanescent, however long forgotten. Its guilt is on our heads. Its consequences have to be experienced by us. We drink as we have brewed. As we make our beds, so we lie on them. There is no escape from the law of consequences. 'If 'twere done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly.' But seeing that it is not done when 'tis done, then perhaps it would be better that it were not done at all. Your deed of a moment, forgotten almost as soon as done, lies there at your door; or to take a more modern and commercial figure, it is debited to your account, and stands inscribed against you for ever.

Think how you would like it, if all your deeds from your childhood, all your follies, your vices, your evil thoughts, your evil impulses, and your evil actions, were all made visible and embodied there before you. They are there, though you do not see them yet. All round your door they sit, ready to meet you and to bay out condemnation as you go forth. They are there, and one day you will find out that they are. For this is the law, certain as the revolution of the stars and fixed as the pillars of the firmament: 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' There is no seed which does not sprout in the harvest of the moral life. Every deed germinates according to its kind. For all that a man does he has to carry the consequences, and every one shall bear his own burden. 'If thou doest not well,' it is not, as we fondly conceive it sometimes to be, a mere passing deflection from the rule of right, which is done and done with, but we have created, as out of our very own substance, a witness against ourselves whose voice can never be stifled. 'If thou doest not well,' thy sin takes permanent form and is fastened to thy door.

And then let me remind you, too, how the metaphor of our text is confirmed by other obvious facts, on which I need but briefly dwell. Putting aside all the remoter bearings of that thought of responsibility, I suppose we all admit that we have consciences; I suppose that we all know that we have memories; I suppose we all of us have seen, in the cases of others, and have experienced for ourselves, how deeds long done and long forgotten have an awful power of rising again after many long years.

Be sure that your memory has in it everything that you ever did. A landscape may be hidden by mists, but a puff of wind will clear them away, and it will all lie there, visible to the furthest horizon. There is no fact more certain than the extraordinary swiftness and completeness with which, in certain circumstances of life, and often very near the close of it, the whole panorama of the past may rise again before a man, as if one lightning flash showed all the dreary desolation that lay behind him. There have been men recovered from drowning and the like, who have told us that, as in an instant, there seemed unrolled before their startled eyes the whole scroll of their earthly career.

The records of memory are like those pages on which you write with sympathetic ink, which disappears when dry, and seems to leave the page blank. You have only to hold it before the fire, or subject it to the proper chemical process, and at once it stands out legible. You are writing your biography upon the fleshly tables of your heart, my brother; and one day it will all be spread out before you, and you will be bid to read it, and to say what you think of it. The stings of a nettle will burn for days, if they are touched with water. The sting and inflammation of your evil deeds, though it has died down, is capable of being resuscitated, and it will be.

What an awful menagerie of unclean beasts some of us have at our doors! What sort of creatures have you tethered at yours? Crawling serpents, ugly and venomous; wild creatures, fierce and bloody, obscene and foul; tigers and bears; lustful and mischievous apes and monkeys? or such as are lovely and of good report,—doves and lambs, creatures pure and peaceable, patient to serve and gentle of spirit? Remember, remember, that what a man soweth—be it hemlock or be it wheat—that, and nothing else, 'shall he reap.'

2. Now, let us look for a moment at the next thought that is here; which is put into a strong, and, to our modern notions, somewhat violent metaphor;—the horrible longing, as it were, of sin toward the sinner: 'Unto thee shall be its desire.'

As I explained, these words are drawn from the previous chapter, where they refer to the holy union of heart and affection in husband and wife. Here they are transferred with tremendous force, to set forth that which is a kind of horrible parody of that conjugal relation. A man is married to his wickedness, is mated to his evil, and it has, as it were, a tigerish longing for him, unhallowed and murderous. That is to say—our sins act towards us as if they desired to draw our love to themselves. This is just another form of the statement, that when once a man has done a wrong thing, it has an awful power of attracting him and making him hunger to do it again. Every evil that I do may, indeed, for a moment create in me a revulsion of conscience; but it also exercises a fascination over me which it is hard to resist. It is a great deal easier to find a man who has never done a wrong thing than to find a man who has only done it once. If the wall of the dyke is sound it will keep the water out, but if there is the tiniest hole in it, the flood will come in. So the evil that you do asserts its power over you, or, in the vigorous metaphor of my text, it has a fierce, longing desire after you, and it gets you into its clutches.

'The foolish woman sitteth in the high places of the city, and saith, Whoso is simple let him turn in hither.' And foolish men go after her, and—'know not that her guests are in the depth of hell.' Ah! my brother! beware of that siren voice that draws you away from all the sweet and simple and pure food which Wisdom spreads upon her table, to tempt the beast that is in you with the words, 'Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.' Beware of the first step, for as sure as you are living, the first step taken will make the second seem to become necessary. The first drop will be followed by a bigger second, and the second, at a shorter interval, by a more copious third, until the drops become a shower, and the shower becomes a deluge. The river of evil is ever wider and deeper, and more tumultuous. The little sins get in at the window, and open the front door for the full-grown housebreakers. One smooths the path for the other. All sin has an awful power of perpetuating and increasing itself. As the prophet says in his vision of the doleful creatures that make their sport in the desolate city, 'None of them shall want her mate. The wild beasts of the desert shall meet with the wild beasts of the island.' Every sin tells upon character, and makes the repetition of itself more and more easy. 'None is barren among them.' And all sin is linked together in a slimy tangle, like a field of seaweed, so that the man once caught in its oozy fingers is almost sure to be drowned.

3. And now, lastly, one word about the command, which is also a promise: 'To thee shall be its desire, and thou shalt rule over it.'

Man's primitive charter, according to the earlier chapters of Genesis, was to have dominion over the beasts of the field. Cain knew what it was to war against the wild creatures which contested the possession of the earth with man, and to tame some of them for his uses. And, says the divine voice, just as you war against the beasts of prey, just as you subdue to your purposes and yoke to your implements the tamable animals over which you have dominion, so rule over *this* wild beast that is threatening you. It is needful for all men, if they do not mean to be torn to pieces, to master the animal that is in them, and the wild thing that has been created out of them. It is bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh. It is your own evil that is thus incarnated there, as it were, before you; and you have to subdue it, if it is not to tyrannise over you. We all admit that in theory, but how terribly hard the practice! The words of our text seem to carry but little hope or comfort in them, to the man who has tried—as, no doubt, many of us have tried—to flee the lusts that war against the soul, and to bridle the animal that is in him. Those who have done so most honestly know best how hard it is, and may fairly ask, Is this useless repetition of the threadbare injunction all that you have to say to us? If so, you may as well hold your tongue. A wild beast sits at my door, you say, and then you bid me, 'Rule thou over it!' Tell me to tame the tiger! 'Canst thou draw out Leviathan with a hook? Wilt thou take him a servant for ever?'

I do not undervalue the earnest and sometimes partially successful efforts at moral reformation which some men of more than usual force of character are able to make, emancipating themselves from the outward practice of gross sin, and achieving for themselves much that is admirable. But if we rightly understand what sin is—namely, the taking self for our law and centre instead of God—and how deep its working and all-pervading its poison, we shall learn the tragic significance of the prophet's question, 'Can the leopard change his spots?' Then may a man cast out sin from his nature by his own resolve, when the body can eliminate poison from the veins by its own energy. If there is nothing more to be said to the world than this message, 'Sin lieth at thy door—rule thou over it,' we have no gospel to preach, and sin's dominion is secure. For there is nothing in all this world of empty, windy words, more empty and windy than to come to a poor soul that is all bespattered and stained with sin, and say to him: 'Get up, and make thyself clean, and keep thyself so!' It cannot be done.

So my text, though it keeps itself within the limits of the law and only proclaims duty, must have hidden, in its very hardness, a sweet kernel of promise. For what God commands God enables us to do.

Therefore these words, 'Rule thou over it,' do really point onwards through all the ages to that one fact in which every man's sin is conquered and neutralised, and every man's struggles may be made hopeful and successful, the great fact that Jesus Christ, God's own Son, came down from heaven, like an athlete descending into the arena, to fight with and to overcome the grim wild beasts, our passions and our sins, and to lead them, transformed, in the silken leash of His love.

My brother! your sin is mightier than you. The old word of the Psalm is true about every one of us, 'Our iniquities are stronger than we.' And, blessed be His name! the hope of the Psalmist is the experience of the Christian: 'As for my transgressions, Thou wilt purge them away.' Christ will strengthen you to conquer; Christ will take away your guilt; Christ will bear, has borne your burden; Christ will cleanse your memory; Christ will purge your conscience. Trusting to Him, and by His power and life within us, we may conquer our evil. Trusting to Him, and for the sake of His blood shed for us all upon the cross, we are delivered from the burden, guilt, and power of our sins and of our sin. With thy hand in His, and thy will submitted to Him, 'thou shalt tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the dragon thou shalt trample under foot.'

WITH, BEFORE, AFTER

'Enoch walked with God.'—GENESIS v. 22.
'Walk before Me.'—GENESIS xvii. 1.
'Ye shall walk after the Lord your God.'—DEUTERONOMY xiii. 4.

YOU will have anticipated, I suppose, my purpose in doing what I very seldom do—cutting little snippets out of different verses and putting them together. You see that these three fragments, in their resemblances and in their differences, are equally significant and instructive. They concur in regarding life as a walk—a metaphor which expresses continuity, so that every man's life is a whole, which expresses progress, which expresses change, and which implies a goal. They agree in saying that God must be brought into a life somehow, and in some aspect, if that life is to be anything else but an aimless wandering, if it is to tend to the point to which every human life should attain. But then they diverge, and, if we put them together, they say to us that there are three different ways in which we ought to bring God into our life. We should 'walk *with* Him,' like Enoch; we should 'walk *before*' Him, as Abraham was bade to do; and we should 'walk *after*' Him, as the command to do was given to all Israel. And these three prepositions, *with*, *before*, *after*, attached to the general idea of life as a walk, give us a triple aspect—which yet is, of course, fundamentally, one—of the way in which life may be ennobled, dignified, calmed, hallowed, focussed, and concentrated by the various relations into which we enter with Him. So I take the three of them.

1. 'Enoch walked *with* God.'

That is a sweet, simple, easily intelligible, and yet lofty way of putting the notion which we bring into a more abstract and less impressive shape when we talk about communion with God. Two men travelling along a road keep each other company. 'How can two walk together except they be agreed?' The companion is at our side all the same, though the mists may have come down and we cannot see Him. We can hear His voice, we can grasp His hand, we can catch the echoes of His steps. We know He is there, and that is enough. Enoch and God walked together, by the simple exercise of the faith that fills the Invisible with one great, loving Face. By a continuous, definite effort, as we are going through the bustle of daily life, and amid all the pettiness and perplexities and monotonies that make up our often weary and always heavy days, we can realise to ourselves that He is of a truth at our sides, and by purity of life and heart we can bring Him nearer, and can make ourselves more conscious of His nearness. For, brethren, the one thing that parts a man from God, and makes it impossible for a heart to expatiate in the thought of His presence, is the contrariety to His will in our conduct. The slightest invisible film of mist that comes across the blue abyss of the mighty sky will blot out the brightest of the stars, and we may sometimes not be able to see the mist, and only know that it is there because we do not see the planet. So unconscious sin may steal in between us and God, and we shall no longer be able to say, 'I walk with Him.'

The Roman Catholics talk, in their mechanical way, of bringing down all the spiritual into the material and formal, about the 'practice of the presence of God.' It is an ugly phrase, but it means a great thing, that Christian people ought, very much more than they do, to aim, day by day, and amidst their daily duties, at realising that most elementary thought which, like a great many other elementary thoughts, is impotent because we believe it so utterly, that wherever we are, we may have Him with us. It is the secret of blessedness, of tranquillity, of power, of everything good and noble.

'I am a stranger with Thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were,' said the Psalmist of old. If he had left out these two little words, 'with Thee,' he would have been uttering a tragic complaint; but when they come in, all that is painful, all that is solitary, all that is transient, bitterly transient, in the long succession of the generations that have passed across earth's scene, and have not been kindred to it, is cleared away and changed into gladness. Never mind, though you are a stranger, if you have that companion. Never mind, though you are only a sojourner; if you have Him with you, whatever passes He will not pass; and though we dwell here in a system to which we do not belong, and its transiency and our transiency bring with them many sorrows, when we can say, 'Lord! Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations,' we are at home, and that eternal home will never pass.

Enoch 'walked with God,' and, of course, 'God took him.' There was nothing else for it, and there could be no other end, for a life of communion with God here has in it the prophecy and the pledge of a life of eternal union hereafter. So, then, 'practise the presence of God.' An old mystic says: 'If I can tell how many times to-day I have thought about God, I have not thought about Him often enough.' Walk with Him by faith, by effort, by purity.

2. And now take the other aspect suggested by the other word God spoke to Abraham: 'I am the Almighty God, walk *before* Me and be thou perfect.'

That suggests, as I suppose I do not need to point out, the idea not only of communion, which the former phrase brought to our minds, but that of the inspection of our conduct. 'As ever in the great Taskmaster's eye,' says the stern Puritan poet, and although one may object to that word 'Taskmaster,' yet the idea conveyed is the correct expansion of the commandment given to Abraham. Observe how 'walk before Me' is dovetailed, as it were, between the revelation 'I am the Almighty God' and the injunction 'Be thou perfect.' The realisation of that presence of the Almighty which is implied in the expression 'Walk before Me,' the assurance that we are in His sight, will lead straight to the fulfilment of the injunction that bears upon the moral conduct. The same connection of thought underlies Peter's injunction, 'Like as He . . . is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation,' followed immediately as it is by, 'If ye call on Him as Father, who without respect of persons judgeth'—as a present estimate—'according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear'—that reverential awe which will lead you to be 'holy even as I am holy.'

This thought that we are in that divine presence, and that there is silently, but most really, a divine opinion being formed of us, consolidated, as it were, moment by moment through our lives, is only tolerable if we have been walking with God. If we are sure, by the power of our communion with Him, of His loving heart as well as of His righteous judgment, then we can spread ourselves out before Him, as a woman will lay out her webs of cloth on the green grass for the sun to blaze down upon them, and bleach the ingrained filth out of them. We must first walk 'with God' before the consciousness that we are walking 'before' Him becomes one that we can entertain and not go mad. When we are sure of the 'with' we can bear the 'before.'

Did you ever see how on a review day, as each successive battalion and company nears the saluting-point where the General inspecting sits, they straighten themselves up and dress their ranks, and pull themselves together as they pass beneath his critical eye. A master's eye makes diligent servants. If we, in the strength of God, would only realise, day by day and act by act of our lives, that we are before Him, what a revolution could be effected on our characters and what a transformation on all our conduct!

'Walk before Me' and you will be perfect. For the Hebrew words on which I am now commenting may be read, in accordance with the usage of the language, as being not only a commandment but a promise, or, rather, not as two commandments, but a commandment with an appended promise, and so as equivalent to 'If you will walk before Me you will be perfect.' And if we realise that we are under 'the pure eyes and perfect judgment of' God, we shall thereby be strongly urged and mightily helped to be perfect as He is perfect.

3. Lastly, take the other relation, which is suggested

by the third of my texts, where Israel as a whole is commanded to 'walk *after* the Lord' their God.

In harmony with the very frequent expression of the Old Testament about 'going after idols,' so Israel here is to 'go after God.' What does that mean? Communion, the consciousness of being judged by God, will lead on to aspiration and loving, longing effort to get nearer and nearer to Him. 'My soul followeth hard after Thee,' said the Psalmist, 'Thy right hand upholdeth me.' That element of yearning aspiration, of eager desire to be closer and closer, and liker and liker, to God must be in all true religion. And unless we have it in some measure, it is useless to talk about being Christian people. To press onwards, not as though we had already attained, but following after, if that we may apprehend that for which also we are apprehended, is the attitude of every true follower of Christ. The very crown of the excellence of the Christian life is that it never can reach its goal, and therefore an immortal youth of aspiration and growth is guaranteed to it. Christian people, are you following after God? Are you any nearer to Him than you were ten years ago? 'Walk with Me, walk before Me, walk after Me.'

I need not do more than remind you of another meaning involved in this same expression. If I walk after God, then I let Him go before me and show me my road. Do you remember how, when the ark was to cross Jordan, the commandment was given to the Israelites to let it go well on in front, so that there should be no mistake about the course, 'for ye have not passed this way heretofore.' Do not be in too great a hurry to press upon the heels of God, if I may so say. Do not let your decisions outrun His providence. Keep back the impatience that would hurry on, and wait for His ripening purposes to ripen and His counsels to develop themselves. Walk after God, and be sure you do not go in front of your Guide, or you will lose both your way and your Guide.

I need not say more than a word about the highest aspect which this third of our commandments takes, 'His sheep follow Him'—'leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps,' that is the culmination of the walking 'with,' and 'before,' and 'after' God which these Old Testament saints were partially practising. All is gathered into the one great word, 'He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk even as He walked.'

THE COURSE AND CROWN OF A DEVOUT LIFE

'And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.'
GENESIS v. 24.

THIS notice of Enoch occurs in the course of a catalogue of the descendants of Adam, from the Creation to the Deluge. It is evidently a very ancient document, and is constructed on a remarkable plan. The formula for each man is the same. So-and-so lived, begat his heir, the next in the series, lived on after that so many years, having anonymous children, lived altogether so long, and then died. The chief thing about each life is the birth of the successor, and each man's career is in broad outline the same. A dreary monotony runs through the ages. How brief and uniform may be the records of lives of striving and tears and smiles and love that stretched through centuries! Nine hundred years shrink into less than as many lines.

The solemn monotony is broken in the case of Enoch. This paragraph begins as usual—he 'lived'; but afterwards, instead of that word, we read that he 'walked with God'—happy they for whom such a phrase is equivalent to 'live'—and, instead of 'died,' it is said of him that 'he *was not.*' That seems to imply that he, as it were, slipped out of sight or suddenly disappeared; as one of the psalms says, 'I looked, and lo! he was not.' He was there a moment ago—now he is gone; and my text tells how that sudden withdrawal came about. God, with whom he walked, put out His hand and took him to Himself. Of course. What other end could there be to a life that was all passed in communion with God except that apotheosis and crown of it all, the lifting of the man into closer communion with his Father and his Friend?

So, then, there are just these two things here—the noblest life and its crown.

1. The noblest life.

'He walked with God.' That is all. There is no need to tell what he did or tried to do, how he sorrowed or joyed, what were his circumstances. These may all fade from men's knowledge as they have somewhat faded from his memory up yonder. It is enough that he walked with God.

Of course, we have here, underlying the phrase, the familiar comparison of life to a journey, with all its suggestions of constant change and constant effort, and with the suggestion, too, that each life should be a progress directly tending to one clearly recognised goal. But passing from that, let us just think for a moment of the characteristics which must go to make up a life of which we can say that it is walking with God. The first of these clearly is the one that the writer of the

Epistle to the Hebrews puts his finger upon, when he makes faith the spring of Enoch's career. The first requisite to true communion with God is vigorous exercise of that faculty by which we realise the fact of His presence with us; and that not as a jealous-eyed inspector, from whose scrutiny we would fain escape, but as a companion and friend to whom we can cleave. 'He that cometh to God,' and walks with God, must first of all 'believe that He *is*'; and passing by all the fascinations of things seen, and rising above all the temptations of things temporal, his realising eye must fix upon the divine Father and see Him nearer and more clearly than these. You cannot walk with God unless you are emancipated from the dominion of sense and time, and are living by the power of that great faculty, which lays hold of the things that are unseen as the realities, and smiles at the false and forged pretensions of material things to be the real. We have to invert the teaching of the world and of our senses. My fingers and my eyes and my ears tell me that this gross, material universe about me is the real, and that all beyond it is shadowy and (sometimes we think) doubtful, or, at any rate, dim and far off. But that is false, and the truth is precisely the other way. The Unseen is the Real, and the Material is the merely Apparent. Behind all visible objects, and giving them all their reality, lies the unchangeable God.

Cultivate the faculty and habit of vigorous faith, if you would walk with God. For the world will put its bandages over your eyes, and try to tempt you to believe that these poor, shabby illusions are the precious things; and we have to shake ourselves free from its harlot kisses and its glozing lies, by very vigorous and continual efforts of the will and of the understanding, if we are to make real to ourselves that which is real, the presence of our God.

Besides this vigorous exercise of the faculty of faith, there is another requisite for a walk with God, closely connected with it, and yet capable of being looked at separately, and that is, that we shall keep up the habit of continual occupation of thought with Him. That is very much an affair of habit with Christian people, and I am afraid that the neglect of it is the habitual practice of the bulk of professing Christians nowadays. It is hard, amidst all our work and thought and joys and sorrows, to keep fresh our consciousness of His presence, and to talk with Him in the midst of the rush of business. But what do we do about our dear ones when we are away from them? The measure of our love of them is accurately represented by the frequency of our remembrances of them. The mother parted from her child, the husband and the wife separated from one another, the lover and the friend, think of each other a thousand times a day. Whenever the spring is taken off, then the natural bent of the inclination and heart assert themselves, and the mind goes back again, as into a sanctuary, into the sweet thought. Is that how we do with God? Do we so walk with Him, as that thought, when released, instinctively sets in that direction? When I take off the break, does my spirit turn to God? If there is no hand at the helm, does the bow always point that way? When the magnet is withdrawn for a moment, does the needle tremble back and settle itself northwards? If we are walking with God, we shall, more times a day than we can count when the evening comes on, have had the thought of Him coming into our hearts 'like some sweet beguiling melody, so sweet we know not we are listening to it.' Thus we shall 'walk with God.'

Then there is another requisite. 'How can two walk together except they be agreed?' 'He that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also so to walk even as He walked.' There is no union with God in such communion possible, unless there be a union with Him by conformity of will and submission of effort and aim to His commandments. Well, then, is that life possible for us? Look at this instance before us. We know very little about how much knowledge of God these people in old days had, but, at all events, it was a great deal less than you and I have. Their theology was very different from ours; their religion was absolutely identical with ours. Their faith, which grasped the God revealed in their creed, was the same as our faith, though the creed which their faith grasped was only an outline sketch of yours and mine. But at all times and in all generations, the element and essence of the religious life has been the same—that is, the realising sense of the living divine presence, the effort and aspiration after communion with Him, and the quiet obedience and conformity of the practical life to His will. And so we can reach out our hands across all the centuries to this pre-Noachian, antediluvian patriarch, dim amongst the mists, and feel that he too is our brother.

And he has set us the example that in all conditions of life, and under the most unfavourable circumstances, it is possible to live in this close touch with God. For in his time, not only was there, as I have said, an incomplete and rudimentary knowledge of God, but in his time the earth was filled with violence, and gigantic forms of evil are represented as having dominated mankind. Amidst it all, the Titanic pride, the godlessness, the scorn, the rudeness, and the violence, amidst it all, this one 'white flower of a blameless life' managed to find nutriment upon the dunghill, and to blossom fresh and fair there. You and I cannot, whatever may be our hindrances in living a consistent Christian life, have anything like the difficulties that this man had and surmounted. For us all, whatever our conditions, such a life is possible.

And then there is another lesson that he teaches us, viz. that such a life is consistent with the completest discharge of all common duties. The outline, as far as appearance was concerned, of this man's life was the same as the outline of those of his ancestors and successors. They are all described in the same terms. The formula is the same. Enoch lived, Mahalaleel, and all the rest of the half-unpronounceable names, they lived, they begat their heirs, and sons and daughters, and then they died. And the same formula is used about this man. He walked with God, but it was while treading the common path of secular life that he did so.

He found it possible to live in communion with God, and yet to do all the common things that men did then. Anybody's house may be a Bethel—a house of God—and anybody's work may be worship; and wherever we are and whatever we do, it is possible therein to serve God, and there to walk with Him.

2. And now a word about the crown of this life of communion. 'He was not, for God took him.'

What wonderful reticence in describing, or rather hinting at, the stupendous miracle that is here in question! Is that like a book that came from the legend-loving and legend-making brains of men; or does it sound like the speech of God, to whom nothing is extraordinary and nothing needs to have a mark of admiration after it? It was the same to Him whether Enoch died or whether He simply took him to Himself. If one wants to know what men would have made of such a thing, if *they* had had to tell it, let them read those wretched Rabbinical fables that have been stitched on to this verse. There they will see how men describe miracles; and here they will see how God does so.

'*He was not.*' As I have said, he disappeared; that was what the world knew. 'God took him'; that was what God tells the world.

Thus this strange exception to the law of death stood, as I suppose, to the ancient world as doing somewhat the same office for them that the translation of Elijah afterwards partially did for Israel, and that the resurrection of Jesus Christ does completely for us, viz. it brought the future life into the realm of fact, and took it out of the dim region of speculation altogether. He establishes a truth who proves it, and he proves a fact that shows it. A doctrine of a future state is not worth much, but the fact of a future state, which was established by this incident then, and is certified for us all now, by the Christ risen from the dead, is all-important. Our gospel is all built upon facts, and this is the earliest fact in man's history which made man's subsistence in other conditions than that of earthly life a certainty.

And then, again, this wonderful exception shows to us, as it did to that ancient world, that the natural end of a religious life is union with God hereafter. It seems to me that the real proofs of a future life are two: one, the fact of Christ's resurrection, and the other, the fact of our religious experience. For anything looks to me more likely, and less incredible, than that a man who could walk with God should only have a poor earthly life to do it in, and that all these aspirations, these emotions, should be bounded and ended by a trivial thing, that touches only the physical frame. Surely, surely, there is nothing so absurd as to believe that he who can say 'Thou art my God,' and who has said it, should ever by anything be brought to cease to say it. Death cannot kill love to God; and the only end of the religious life of earth is its perfecting in heaven. The experiences that we have here, in their loftiness and in their incompleteness, equally witness for us, of the rest and the perfectness that remain for the children of God.

Then, again, this man in his unique experience was, and is, a witness of the fact that death is an excrescence, and results from sin. I suppose that he trod the road which the divine intention had destined to be trodden by all the children of men, if they had not sinned; and that his experience, unique as it is, is a survival, so to speak, of what was meant to be the law for humanity, unless there had intervened the terrible fact of sin and its wages, death. The road had been made, and this one man was allowed to travel along it that we might all learn, by the example of the exception, that the rule under which we live was not the rule that God originally meant for us, and that death has resulted from the fact of transgression. No doubt Enoch had in him the seeds of it, no doubt there were the possibilities of disease and the necessity of death in his physical frame, but God has shown us in that one instance, and in the other of the great prophet's, how *He* is not subject to the law that men shall die, although men are subject to it, and that if He will, He can take them all to Himself, as He did take these two, and will take them who, at last, shall not die but be changed.

Let me remind you that this unique and exceptional end of a life of communion may, in its deepest, essential character, be experienced by each of us. There are two passages in the book of Psalms, both of which I regard as allusions to this incident. The one of them is in the forty-ninth Psalm and reads thus: 'He will deliver my soul from the power of the grave, for He will take me.' Our version conceals the allusion, by its unfortunate and non-literal rendering 'receive.' The same word is employed there as here. Can we fail to see the reference? The Psalmist expects his soul to be 'delivered from the power of the grave,' because God *takes* it.

And again, in the great seventy-third Psalm, which marks perhaps the highwater mark of pre-Christian anticipations of a future state, we read: 'Thou wilt guide me by Thy counsel, and afterwards *take* me' (again the same word) 'to glory.' Here, again, the Psalmist looks back to the unique and exceptional instance, and in the rapture and ecstasy of the faith that has grasped the living God as his portion, says to himself: 'Though the externals of Enoch's end and of mine may differ, their substance will be the same, and I, too, shall cease to be seen of men, because God takes me into the secret of His pavilion, by the loving clasp of His lifting hand.'

Enoch was led, if I may say so, round the top of the valley, beyond the head waters of the dark river, and was kept on the high level until he got to the other side. You and I have to go down the hill, out of the sunshine. in among the dank weeds, to stumble over the black rocks, and wade through the deep water; but we shall get over to the same place where he stands, and He that took him round by the top will 'take' us through the river; and so shall we 'ever be with the Lord.'

'Enoch walked with God and he was not; for God took him.' This verse is like some little spring with trees and flowers on a cliff. The dry genealogical table—and here this bit of human life in it! How unlike the others—they *lived* and they *died*; this man's life was walking with God and his departure was a fading away, a ceasing to be found here. It is remarkable in how calm a tone the Bible speaks of its supernatural events. We should not have known this to be a miracle but for the Epistle to the Hebrews.

The dim past of these early chapters carries us over many centuries. We know next to nothing about the men, where they lived, how they lived, what thoughts they had, what tongue they spoke. Some people would say that they never lived at all. I believe, and most of you, I suppose, believe that they did. But how little personality we give them! Little as we know of environment and circumstances, we know the main thing, the fact of their having been. Then we are sure that they had sorrow and joy, strife and love, toil and rest, like the rest of us, that whether their days were longer or shorter they were filled much as ours are, that whatever was the pattern into which the quiet threads of their life was woven it was, warp and weft, the same yarn as ours. In broad features every human life is much the same. Widely different as the clothing of these grey fathers in their tents, with their simple contrivances and brief records, is from that of cultivated busy Englishmen to-day, the same human form is beneath both.

And further, we know but little as to their religious ideas, how far they were surrounded with miracles, what they knew of God and of His purposes, how they received their knowledge, what served them for a Bible. Of what positive institutions of religion they had we know nothing; whether for them there was sacrifice and a sabbath day, how far the original gospel to Adam was known or remembered or understood by them. All that is perfectly dark to us. But this we know, that those of them who were godly men lived by the same power by which godly men live nowadays. Whatever their creed, their religion was ours. Religion, the bond that unites again the soul to God, has always been the same.

THE SAINT AMONG SINNERS

'These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God. And Noah begat three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted His way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch. And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits. A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above; and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof; with lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it. And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die. But with thee will I establish My covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee. And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male and female. Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, two of every sort shall come unto thee, to keep them alive. And take thou unto thee of all food that is eaten, and thou shalt gather it to thee; and it shall be for food for thee, and for them. Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he.'—GENESIS vi. 9-22.

1. NOTICE here, first, the solitary saint. Noah stands alone 'in his generations' like some single tree, green

and erect, in a forest of blasted and fallen pines. 'Among the faithless, faithful only he.' His character is described, so to speak, from the outside inwards. He is 'righteous,' or discharging all the obligations of law and of his various relationships. He is 'perfect.' His whole nature is developed, and all in due symmetry and proportion; no beauty wanting, no grace cultivated at the expense of others. He is a full man; not a one-sided and therefore a distorted one. Of course we do not take these words to imply sinlessness. They express a relative, not an absolute, completeness. Hence we may learn both a lesson of stimulus and of hope. We are not to rest satisfied with partial goodness, but to seek to attain an all-round perfectness, even in regard to the graces least natural to our dispositions. And we can rejoice to believe that God is generous in His acceptance and praise. He does not grudge commendation, but takes account of the deepest desires and main tendencies of a life, and sees the germ as a full-blown flower, and the bud as a fruit.

Learn, too, that solitary goodness is possible. Noah stood uninfected by the universal contagion; and, as is always the case, the evil around, which he did not share, drove him to a more rigid abstinence from it. A Christian who is alone 'in his generations,' like a lily among nettles, has to be, and usually is, a more earnest Christian than if he were among like-minded men. The saints in 'Cæsar's household' needed to be very unmistakable saints, if they were not to be swept away by the torrent of godlessness. It is hard, but it is possible, for a boy at school, or a young man in an office, or a soldier in a barrack, to stand alone, and be Christlike; but only on condition that he yields to no temptation to drop his conduct to the level around him, and is never guilty of compromise. Once yield, and all is over. Flowers grow on a dunghill, and the very reeking rottenness may make the bloom finer.

Learn, too, that the true place for the saint is 'in his generations.' If the mass is corrupt, so much the more need to rub the salt well in. Disgust and cowardice, and the love of congenial society, keep Christian people from mixing with the world, which they must do if they are to do Christ's work in it. There is a great deal too much union with the world, and a great deal too much separation from it, nowadays, and both are of the wrong sort. We cannot keep too far away from it, by abstinence from living by its maxims, and tampering with its pleasures. We cannot mix too much with it if we take our Christianity with us, and remember our vocation to be its light.

Notice, again, the companion of the solitary saint. What beauty there is in that description of the isolated man, passing lonely amid his contemporaries, like a stream of pure water flowing through some foul liquid, and untouched by it, and yet not alone in his loneliness, because 'he walked with God!' The less he found congenial companionship on earth, the more he realised God as by his side. The remarkable phrase, used only of Enoch and of Noah, implies a closer relation than the other expression, 'To walk before God.' Communion, the habitual occupation of mind and heart with God, the happy sense of His presence making every wilderness and solitary place glad because of Him, the child's clasping the father's hand with his tiny fingers, and so being held up and lifted over many a rough place, are all implied. Are we lonely in outward reality? Here is our unfailing companion. Have we to stand single among companions, who laugh at us and our religion? One man, with God to back him, is always in the majority. Though surrounded by friends, have we found that, after all, we live and suffer, and must die alone? Here is the all-sufficient Friend, if we have fellowship with whom our hearts will be lonely no more.

Observe that this communion is the foundation of all righteousness in conduct. Because Noah walked with God, he was 'just' and 'perfect.' If we live habitually in the holy of holies, our faces will shine when we come forth. If we desire to be good and pure, we must dwell with God, and His Spirit will pass into our hearts, and we shall bear the fragrance of his presence wherever we go. Learn, also, that communion with God is not possible unless we are fighting against our sin, and have some measure of holiness. We begin communion with Him, indeed, not by holiness, but by faith. But it is not kept up without the cultivation of purity. Sin makes fellowship with God impossible. 'Can two walk together, except they be agreed?' 'What communion hath light with darkness?' The delicate bond which unites us in happy communion with God shrivels up, as if scorched, at the touch of sin. 'If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie.'

2. Notice the universal apostasy. Two points are brought out in the sombre description. The first is moral corruption; the second, violence. Bad men are cruel men. When the bonds which knit society to God are relaxed, selfishness soon becomes furious,

and forcibly seizes what it lusts after, regardless of others' rights. Sin saps the very foundations of social life, and makes men into tigers, more destructive to each other than wild beasts. All our grand modern schemes for the reformation of society will fail unless they begin with the reformation of the individual. To walk with God is the true way to make men gentle and pitying.

Learn from this dark outline that God gazes in silence on the evil. That is a grand, solemn expression, 'Corrupt before God.' All this mad riot of pollution and violence is holding its carnival of lust and blood under the very eye of God, and He says never a word. So is it ever. Like some band of conspirators in a dark corner, bad men do deeds of darkness, and fancy they are unseen, and that God forgets *them*, because they forget God; and all the while His eye is fixed on them, and the darkness is light about them. Then comes a further expression of the same thought: 'God looked upon the earth.' As a sudden beam of sunshine out of a thunder-cloud, His eye flashes down, not as if He then began to know, but that His knowledge then began, as it were, to act.

3. What does the stern sentence on the rotten world teach us? A very profound truth, not only of the certain divine retribution, but of the indissoluble connection of sin with destruction. The same word is thrice employed in verses 11 and 12 to express 'corruption,' and in verse 13 to express 'destruction.' A similar usage is found in 1 Corinthians iii. 17, where the same Greek word is translated 'defile' and 'destroy.' This teaches us that, in deepest reality, corruption is destruction, that sin is death, that every sinner is a suicide. God's act in punishment corresponds to, and

is the inevitable outcome of, our act in transgression. So fatal is all evil, that one word serves to describe both the poison-secreting root and the poisoned fruit. Sin is death in the making; death is sin finished.

The promise of deliverance, which comes side by side with the stern sentence, illustrates the blessed truth that God's darkest threatenings are accompanied with a revelation of the way of escape. The ark is always shown along with the flood. Zoar is pointed out when God foretells Sodom's ruin. We are no sooner warned of the penalties of sin, than we are bid to hear the message of mercy in Christ. The brazen serpent is ever reared where the venomous snakes bite and burn.

4. We pass by the details of the construction of the ark to draw the final lesson from the exact obedience of Noah. We have the statement twice over, He did 'according to all that God commanded him.' It was no easy thing for him to build the ark, amidst the scoffing of his generations. Smart witticisms fell around him like hail. All the 'practical men' thought him a dreamy fool, wasting his time, while they prospered and made something of life. The Epistle to the Hebrews tells us the secret of his obedience: 'By faith, Noah,' etc. He realised the distant unseen, because he believed Him who warned him of it. The immediate object of his faith was 'the things not seen as yet'; but the real, deepest object was God, whose word showed him these. So faith is always trust in a divine Person, whether it lays hold of the past sacrifice, the present indwelling Spirit, or the future heaven.

Noah's example teaches us the practical effects of faith. 'Moved with godly fear,' says Hebrews; by which is meant, not a mere dread of personal evil, for Noah was assured of safety—but that godly reverence and happy fear which dwells with faith, and secures precise obedience. Learn that a faith which does not work on the feelings is a very poor thing. Some Christian people have a great horror of emotional religion. Unemotional religion is a great deal worse. The road by which faith gets at the hands is through the heart. And he who believes but feels nothing, will do exactly as much as he feels, and probably does not really believe much more.

So after Noah's emotion followed his action. He was bid to prepare his ark, we have only to take refuge in the ark which God has prepared in Christ; but the principle of Noah's obedience applies to us all. He realised so perfectly that future, with its double prospect of destruction and deliverance, that his whole life was moulded by the conduct which should lead to his escape. The far-off flood was more real to him than the shows of life around him. Therefore he could stand all the gibes, and gave himself to a course of life which was sheer folly unless that future was real. Perhaps a hundred and twenty years passed between the warning and the flood; and for all that time he held on his way, nor faltered in his faith. Does our faith realise that which lies before us with anything like similar clearness? Do we see that future shining through all the trivial, fleeting present? Does it possess weight and solidity enough to shape our lives? Noah's creed was much shorter than ours; but I fear his faith was as much stronger.

5. We may think, finally, of the vindication of his faith. For a hundred and twenty years the wits

laughed, and the 'common-sense' people wondered, and the patient saint went on hammering and pitching at his ark. But one morning it began to rain; and by degrees, somehow, Noah did not seem quite such a fool. The jests would look rather different when the water was up to the knees of the jesters; and their sarcasms would stick in their throats as they drowned. So is it always. So it will be at the last great day. The men who lived for the future, by faith in Christ, will be found out to have been the wise men when the future has become the present, and the present has become the past, and is gone for ever; while they who had no aims beyond the things of time, which are now sunk beneath the dreary horizon, will awake too late to the conviction that they are outside the ark of safety, and that their truest epitaph is 'Thou fool!'

'CLEAR SHINING AFTER RAIN'

'And God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark: and God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters asswaged; The fountains also of the deep and the windows of heaven were stopped, and the rain from heaven was restrained; And the waters returned from off the earth continually: and after the end of the hundred and fifty days the waters were abated. And the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat. And the waters decreased continually until the tenth month: in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, were the tops of the mountains seen. And it came to pass at the end of forty days that Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made: And he sent forth a raven, which went forth to and fro, until the waters were dried up from off the earth. Also he sent forth a dove from him. to see if the waters were abated from off the face of the ground; But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, and she returned unto him into the ark, for the waters were on the face of the whole earth: then he put forth his hand, and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the ark. And he stayed yet other seven days; and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark; And the dove came in to him in the evening; and, lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf pluckt off: so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth. And he stayed yet other seven days; and sent forth the dove; which returned not again unto him any more. And it came to pass in the six hundredth and first year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from off the earth: and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and, behold, the face of the ground was dry. And in the second month, on the seven and twentieth day of the month, was the earth dried. And God spake unto Noah, saying, Go forth of the ark, thou, and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons' wives with thee. Bring forth with thee every living thing that is with thee, of all flesh, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth; that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply upon the earth. And Noah went forth, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him: Every beast, every creeping thing, and every fowl, and whatsoever creepeth upon the earth, after their kinds, went forth out of the ark. And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in His heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.'—GENESIS viii. 1-22.

THE universal tradition of a deluge is most naturally accounted for by admitting that there was a 'universal deluge.' But 'universal' does not apply to the extent as embracing the whole earth, but as affecting the small area then inhabited—an area which was probably not greater than the valleys of the Euphrates and Tigris. The story in Genesis is the Hebrew version of the universal tradition, and its plain affinity to the cuneiform narratives is to be frankly accepted. But the relationship of these two is not certain. Are they mother and daughter, or are they sisters? The theory that the narrative in Genesis is derived from the Babylonian, and is a purified, elevated rendering of it, is not so likely as that both are renderings of a more primitive account, to which the Hebrew narrative has kept true, while the other has tainted it with polytheistic ideas. In this passage the cessation of the flood is the theme, and it brings out both the love of the God who sent the awful punishment, and the patient godliness of the man who was spared from it. So it completes the teaching of the flood, and proclaims that God 'in wrath remembers mercy.'

1. 'God remembered Noah.' That is a strong 'anthropomorphism,' like many other things in Genesis—very natural when these records were written, and

bearing a true meaning for all times. It might seem as if, in the wild rush of the waters from beneath and from above, the little handful in the ark were forgotten. Had the Judge of all the earth, while executing 'terrible things in righteousness,' leisure to think of them who were 'afar off upon the sea'? Was it a blind wrath that had been let loose? No; in all the severity there was tender regard for those worthy of it. Judgment was discriminating. The sunshine of love broke through even the rain-clouds of the flood.

So the blessed lesson is taught that, in the widest sweep of the most stormy judgments, there are those who abide safely, fearing no evil. Though the waters are out, there is a rock on which we may stand safe, above their highest wave. And why did God 'remember Noah'? It was not favouritism, arbitrary and immoral. Noah was bid to build the ark, because he was 'righteous' in a world of evil-doers; he was 'remembered' in the ark, because he had believed God's warning, obeyed God's command as seeing the judgment 'not seen as yet,' and so 'became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.' They who trust God, and, trusting Him, realise as if present the future judgment, and, 'moved with fear,' take refuge in the ark, are never forgot by Him, even while the world is drowned. They live in His heart, and in due time He will show that He remembers them.

2. The gradual subsidence of the flood is told with singular exactitude of dates, which are certainly peculiar if they are not historical. The slow decrease negatives the explanation of the story as being the exaggerated remembrance of some tidal-wave caused by earthquake and the like. Precisely five months

after the flood began, the ark grounded, and the two sources, the rain from above and the 'fountains of the deep' (that is, probably, the sea), were 'restrained,' and a high wind set in. That date marked the end of the increase of the waters, and consequently the beginning of their decrease. Seven months and ten days elapsed between it and the complete restoration of the earth to its previous condition. That time was divided into stages. Two months and a half passed before the highest land emerged; two months more and the surface was all visible; a month and twenty-seven days more before 'the earth was dry.' The frequent recurrence of the sacred numbers, seven and ten, is noticeable. The length of time required for the restorative process witnesses to the magnitude of the catastrophe, impresses the imagination, and suggests the majestic slowness of the divine working, and how He uses natural processes for His purposes of moral government, and rules the wildest outbursts of physical agents. The Lord as king 'sitteth upon the flood,' and opens or seals the fountains of the great deep as He will. Scripture does not tell of the links between the First Cause and the physical effect. It brings the latter close up to the former. The last link touches the fixed staple, and all between may be ignored.

But the patient expectance of Noah comes out strongly in the story, as well as the gradualness of God's working. Not till 'forty days'—a round number—after the land appeared, did He do anything. He waited quietly till the path was plain. Eager impatience does not become those who trust in God. It is not said that the raven was sent out to see if the waters were abated. No purpose is named, nor is it said that it returned at all. 'To and fro' may mean over the waste of waters, not back and forward to and from the ark. The raven, from its blackness, its habit of feeding on carrion, its fierceness, was a bird of ill-omen, and sending it forth has a grim suggestion that it would find food enough, and 'rest for the sole of its foot,' among the swollen corpses floating on the dark waters. The dove, on the other hand, is the emblem of gentleness, purity, and tenderness. She went forth, the very embodiment of meek hope that wings its way over dark and desolate scenes of calamity and judgment, and, though disappointed at first, patiently waits till the waters sink further, discerns the earliest signs of their drying up, and comes back to the sender with a report which is a prophecy: 'Your peace shall return to you again.' Happy they who send forth, not the raven, but the dove, from their patient hearts. Their gentle wishes come back with confirmation of their hopes, 'as doves to their windows.'

3. But Noah did not leave the ark, though 'the earth was dry.' God had 'shut him in,' and it must be God who brings him out. We have to take heed of precipitate departure from the place where He has fixed us. Like Israel in the desert, it must be 'at the commandment of the Lord' that we pitch the camp, and at the commandment of the Lord that we journey. Till He speaks we must remain, and as soon as He speaks we must remove. 'God spake unto Noah, saying, Go forth . . . and Noah went forth.' Thus prompt must be our obedience. A sacrifice of gratitude is the fit close of each epoch in our lives, and the fit beginning of each new one. Before he thought of anything else, Noah built his altar. All our deeds should be set in a golden ring of thankfulness. So the past is hallowed, and the future secure of God's protection. It is no

unworthy conception of God which underlies the strongly human expression that he 'smelled the sweet savour.' He delights in our offerings, and our trustful, grateful love is 'an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable' to Him. The pledge that He will not any more curse the ground for man's sake is occasioned by the sacrifice, but is grounded on what seems, at first sight, a reason for the very opposite conclusion. Man's evil heart the reason for God's forbearance? Yes, because it is 'evil *from his youth.*' He deals with men as knowing our frame, the corruption of our nature, and the need that the tree should be made good before it can bring forth good fruit. Therefore He will not smite, but rather seek to draw to repentance by His goodness, and by the faithful continuance of His beneficence in the steadfast covenant of revolving seasons, 'filling our hearts with food and gladness.'

THE SIGN FOR MAN AND THE REMEMBRANCER FOR GOD

'And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you; And with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth. And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between Me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between Me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud: And I will remember My covenant, which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, This is the token of the covenant, which I have established between Me and all flesh that is upon the earth.'

GENESIS ix. 8-17.

THE previous verses of this chapter lay down the outlines of the new order which followed the flood.

The blessing and the command to be fruitful are repeated. The dominion over animals is confirmed, but enlarged by the permission to use them as food, and by the laying on them of 'the terror of you and the dread of you.' The sanctity of human life is laid down with great emphasis. Violence and bloodshed had brought about the flood. The appalling destruction effected by it might lead to the mistaken notion that God held man's life cheap. Therefore the corner-stone of future society is laid in that declaration that life is inviolable. These blessings and commands are followed by this remarkable section, which deals with God's covenant with Noah, and its token in the rainbow.

1. The covenant is stated, and the parties concerned in it enumerated in verses 3-11. When Noah came forth from the ark, after the stupendous act of divine justice, he must have felt that the first thing he needed was some assurance as to the footing on which he and the new world round him stood with God. The flood had swept away the old order. It had revealed terrible possibilities of destruction in nature, and terrible possibilities of wrath in God. Was any knowledge of His intentions and ways possible? Could continuance of the new order be counted on? The answer to such questions was—God's covenant. Now, as then, when any great convulsions shake what seems permanent, and bring home to men the thinness of the crust of use and wont roofing an infinite depth of unknown possibilities of change, on which we walk, the heart cries out for some assurance of perpetuity, and some revelation of God's mind. We can have such, as truly as Noah had, if we use the Revelation given us in Jesus.

In God's covenant with Noah, the fact of the covenant may first be noted. What is a covenant? The term usually implies a reciprocal bond, both parties to which come under obligations by it, each to the other. But, in this case, there are no obligations on the part of man or of the creatures. This covenant is God's only. It is contingent on nothing done by the recipients. He binds Himself, whatever be the conduct of men. This covenant is the self-motived promise of an unconditional mercy. May we not say that the 'New Covenant' in Jesus Christ is after the pattern of this, rather than after the manner of compacts which require both parties to do their several parts?

But note the great thought, that God limits His freedom of action by this definite promise. Noah was not left to grope in dread among the terrible possibilities opened by the flood. God marked out the line on which He would move, and marked off a course which He would not pursue. It is like a king giving his subjects a constitution. Men can reckon on God. He has let them know much of the principles and methods of His government. He has buoyed out His course, as it were, on the ocean, or pricked it down upon a chart. We have not to do with arbitrary power, with inscrutable will. Our God is not one who 'giveth no account of any of His matters.' To use a common saying, 'We know where to have Him.'

The substance of this covenant is noteworthy. It is concerned solely with physical nature. There is nothing spiritual or 'religious' about it. There are to be no more universal deluges. That is all which it guarantees. But consider how important such an assurance was in two aspects. Note the solemn light which it threw on the past. It taught that the flood was an exception in the divine government, which should stand unrepeated for ever, in its dread pre eminence testifying how awful it was as a judicial act, and how outrageous had been the guilt which it drowned out of existence and sight. A wholesome terror at the unexampled act of judgment would fill the hearts of the little group which now represented mankind.

Consider the effect of the covenant in encouraging hope. We have said that the one thing needful for Noah was some assurance that the new order would last. He was like a man who has just been rescued from an earthquake or a volcanic eruption. The ground seems to reel beneath him. Old habitudes have been curled up like leaves in the fire. Is there to be any fixity, any ground for continuous action, or for labour for a moment beyond the present? Is it worth while to plant or sow? Men who have lived through national tempests or domestic crashes know how much they need to be steadied afterwards by some reasonable assurance of comparative continuity. And these men, in the childhood of the race, would need it much. So they were sent out to till the earth, and to begin again strenuous lives, with this covenant to keep them from falling into a hand-to-mouth style of life, which would have brought them down to barbarism. We all need the same kind of assurance; and then, when we get it, such is the weakness of humanity, we are tempted to think that continuity means eternity, and that, because probably to-morrow shall be as this day, there will never come a to-morrow which shall be quite unlike to-day. The crust of cooled earth, on which we walk, is thick enough to bear man and all his works, but there comes a time when it will crack. The world will not be flooded again, but we forget, what Noah did not know, that it will be burned.

The parties to the covenant must be noticed. Note how frequently the share in it, which all living creatures have, is referred to in the context. In verse 10 the language becomes strained (in the original), in order to express the universal participation of all living creatures; and in verse 13 'the earth' itself is spoken of as one party. God recognises obligations to all living things, and even to the dumb, non-sentient earth. He will not causelessly quench one bright, innocent life, nor harm one clod. Surely this is, at least, an incipient revelation of a God whose 'tender mercies are over all his works.' He 'doth take care for oxen'; and man, with all the creatures that are with him, and all the wild ones that 'come not near' him, and all the solid structure of the world, are held in one covenant of protecting and sustaining providence and power.

2. The sign of the covenant is described at great length in verses 12-17. Note that verses 12, 13 state the general idea of a token or sign, that verses 14-16 deepen this by stating that the token to man is a reminder to God, and that verse 17 sums up the whole with emphatic repetition of the main points. The narrative does not imply, as has often been supposed, that the rainbow was visible for the first time after the deluge. To suppose that, is to read more into the story than is there, or than common sense tolerates. If there were showers and sunshine, there must have been rainbows. But the fair vision strode

across the sky with no articulate promise in its loveliness, though it must always have kindled wonder, and sometimes stirred deeper thoughts. Now, for the first time, it was made 'a sign,' the visible pledge of God's promise.

Mark the emphasis with which God's agency is declared and His ownership asserted. '*I* do set *My* bow.' Neither Noah nor the writer knew anything about refraction or the prismatic spectrum. But perhaps they knew more about the rainbow than people do who know all about how it comes, except that God sets it in the cloud, and that it is His. Let us have the facts which science labels as such, by all means, and the more the better; but do not let us forget that there are other facts in nature which science has no means of attaining, but which are as solid and a great deal deeper than those which it supplies.

The natural adaptation of the rainbow for this office of a token is too plain to need dwelling on. It 'fills the sky when storms prepare to part,' and hence is a natural token that the downpour is being stayed. Somewhere there must be a bit of blue through which the sun can pierce; and the small gap, which is large enough to let it out, will grow till all the sky is one azure dome. It springs into sight in front of the cloud, without which it could not be, so it typifies the light which may glorify judgments, and is born of sorrows borne in the presence of God. It comes from the sunshine smiting the cloud; so it preaches the blending of love with divine judgment. It unites earth and heaven; so it proclaims that heavenly love is ready to transform earthly sorrows. It stretches across the land;

so it speaks of an all-embracing care, which enfolds the earth and all its creatures.

It is not only a 'sign to men.' It is also, in the strong anthropomorphism of the narrative, a remembrancer to God. Of course this is accommodation of the representation of His nature to the limitations of ours. And the danger of attaching unworthy ideas to it is lessened by noticing that He is said to set His bow in the cloud, before it acts as His remembrancer. Therefore, He had remembered before it appeared. The truth, conveyed in the childlike language, is that God has His covenant ever before Him, and that He responds to and honours the appeal made to Him, by that which He has Himself appointed for a sign to men. The expectant eyes of the trustful man and the eye of God meet, as it were, in looking on the sign. On earth it nourishes faith; in heaven it moves to love and blessing. God can be reminded of what He always remembers. The rainbow reminds Him of His covenant by its calm light. Jesus Christ reminds Him of His grace by His intercession before the throne. We remind Him of His plighted faithfulness by our prayers. 'Ye that are the Lord's remembrancers, keep not silence.

AN EXAMPLE OF FAITH

'Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came. And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him. And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Beth-el, and pitched his tent, having Beth-el on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord. And Abram journeyed, going on still toward the south.'

GENESIS xii. 1-9.

I

WE stand here at the well-head of a great river—a narrow channel, across which a child can step, but which is to open out a broad bosom that will reflect the sky and refresh continents. The call of Abram is the most important event in the Old Testament, but it is also an eminent example of individual faith. For both reasons he is called 'the Father of the Faithful.' We look at the incident here mainly from the latter point of view. It falls into three parts.

1. The divine voice of command and promise.—God's servants have to be separated from home and kindred, and all surroundings. The command to Abram was no mere arbitrary test of obedience. God could not have done what He meant with him, unless He had got him by himself. So Isaiah (li. 2) put his finger on the essential when he says, 'I called him alone.' God's communications are made to solitary souls, and His voice to us always summons us to forsake friends and companions, and to go apart with God. No man gets speech of God in a crowd. If you desired to fill a person with electricity, you used to put him on a stool with glass legs, to keep him from earthly contact. If the quickening impulse from the great magnet is to charge the soul, that soul must be isolated. 'He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.'

The vagueness of the command is significant. Abram did not know 'whither he went.' He is not told that Canaan is the land, till he has reached

Canaan. A true obedience is content to have orders enough for present duty. Ships are sometimes sent out with sealed instructions, to be opened when they reach latitude and longitude so-and-so. That is how we are all sent out. Our knowledge goes no farther ahead than is needful to guide our next step. If we 'go out' as He bids us, He will show us what to do next.

> 'I do not ask to see
> The distant scene; one step enough for me.'

Observe the promise. We may notice that it needed a soul raised above the merely temporal to care much for such promises. They would have been but thin diet for earthly appetites. 'A great nation'; a divine blessing; to be a source of blessing to the whole world, and a touchstone by their conduct to which men would be blessed or cursed;—what was there in these to fascinate a man, unless he had faith to teach him the relative importance of the earthly and the heavenly, the present and the future? Notice that the whole promise appeals to unselfish desires. It is always, in some measure, elevating to live for a future, rather than a present, good; but if it be only the same kind of good as the present would yield, it is a poor affair. The only really ennobling faith is one which sets before itself a future full of divine blessing, and of diffusion of that blessing through us, and which therefore scorns delights, and for such gifts is content to be solitary and a wanderer.

2. The obedience of faith.—We have here a wonderful example of prompt, unquestioning obedience to a bare word. We do not know how the divine command was conveyed to Abram. We simply read, 'The Lord

said'; and if we contrast this with verse 7, 'The Lord appeared . . . and said,' it will seem probable that there was no outward sign of the divine will. The patriarch knew that he was following a divine command, and not his own purpose; but there seems to have been no appeal to sense to authenticate the inward voice. He stands, then, on a high level, setting the example of faith as unconditional acceptance of, and obedience to, God's bare word.

Observe that faith, which is the reliance on a person, and therefore trust in his word, passes into both forms of confidence in that word as promise, and obedience to that word as command. We cannot cut faith in halves, and exercise the one aspect without the other. Some people's faith says that it delights in God's promises, but it does not delight in His commandments. That is no faith at all. Whoever takes God at His word, will take all His words. There is no faith without obedience; there is no obedience without faith.

We have already said enough about the separation which was effected by Abram's journey; but we may just notice that the departure from his father's house was but the necessary result of the gulf between them and him, which had been opened by his faith. They were idolaters; he worshipped one God. That drove them farther apart than the distance between Sichem and Haran. When sympathy in religion was at an end, the breach of all other ties was best. So to-day, whether there be outward separation or no, depends on circumstances; but every true Christian is parted from the dearest who is not a Christian, by an abyss wider than any outward distance can make. The law for us is

Abram's law, 'Get thee out.' Either our faith will separate us from the world, or the world will separate us from our faith and our God.

The companionship of Lot, who attaches himself to Abram, teaches that religion, in its true possessors, exercises an attractive influence over even common natures, and may win them to a loftier life. Some weak eyes may discern more glory in the sunshine tinting a poor bit of mist into ruddy light than in the beam which is too bright to look at. A faithful Abram will draw Lot after him.

'They went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.' Compare this singular expression with chapter xi. 31, where we have Terah's emigration from Ur described in the same terms, with the all-important difference in the end, 'They came' not into Canaan, but 'unto Haran, and dwelt there.' Many begin the course; one finishes it. Terah's journeying was only in search of pasture and an abode. So he dropped his wider scheme when the narrower served his purpose. It was an easy matter to go from Ur to Haran. Both were on the same bank of the Euphrates. But to cross the broad, deep, rapid river was a different thing, and meant an irrevocable cutting loose from the past life. Only the man of faith did that. There are plenty of half-and-half Christians, who go along merrily from Ur to Haran; but when they see the wide stream in front, and realise how completely the other side is separated from all that is familiar, they take another thought, and conclude they have come far enough, and Haran will serve their turn.

Again, the phrase teaches us the certain issue of patient pilgrimage and persistent purpose. There is no mystery in getting to the journey's end. 'One foot up, and the other foot down,' continued long enough, will bring to the goal of the longest march. It looks a weary journey, and we wonder if we shall ever get thither. But the magic of 'one step at a time' does it. The guide is also the upholder of our way. 'Every one of them appeareth before God in Zion.'

3. The life in the land.—The first characteristic of it is its continual wandering. This is the feature which the Epistle to the Hebrews marks as significant. There was no reason but his own choice why Abram should continue to journey, and prefer to pitch his tent now under the terebinth tree of Moreh, now by Hebron, rather than to enter some of the cities of the land. He dwelt in tents because he looked for the city. The clear vision of the future detached him, as it will always detach men, from close participation in the present. It is not because we are mortal, and death is near at the furthest, that the Christian is to sit loose to this world, but because he lives by the hope of the inheritance. He must choose to be a pilgrim, and keep himself apart in feeling and aims from this present. The great lesson from the wandering life of Abram is, 'Set your affection on things above.' Cultivate the sense of belonging to another polity than that in the midst of which you dwell. The Canaanites christened Abram 'The Hebrew' (Genesis xiv. 13), which may be translated 'The man from the other side.' That is the name which all true Christians should deserve. They should bear their foreign extraction in their faces, and never be naturalised subjects here. Life is wholesomer in the tent under the

spreading tree, with the fresh air blowing about us and clear sky above, than in the Canaanite city.

Observe, too, that Abram's life was permeated with worship. Wherever he pitches his tent, he builds an altar. So he fed his faith, and kept up his communion with God. The only condition on which the pilgrim life is possible, and the temptations of the world cease to draw our hearts, is that all life shall be filled with the consciousness of the divine presence, our homes altars, and ourselves joyful thankofferings. Then every abode is blessed. The undefended tent is a safe fortress, in which dwelling we need not envy those who dwell in palaces. Common tasks will then be fresh, full of interest, because we see God in them, and offer them up to Him. The wandering life will be a life of walking with God, and progressive knowledge of Him; and over all the roughnesses and the sorrows and the trivialities of it will be spread 'the light that never was on sea or land, the consecration' of God's presence, and the peacefulness of communion with Him.

Again, we may notice that the life of obedience was followed by fuller manifestations of God, and of His will. God 'appeared' when Abram was in the land. Is it not always true that obedience is blessed by closer vision and more knowledge? To him that hath shall be given; and he who has followed the unseen Guide through dimly discerned paths to an invisible goal, will be gladdened when he reaches the true Canaan, by the sight of Him whom, having not seen, he loved. Even here on earth obedience is the path to fuller knowledge; and when the pilgrims who have left all and followed the Captain of salvation through a deeper, darker stream than Abram crossed, have touched the other side, God will appear to them, and say, as the enraptured eye gazes amazed on the goodly land, 'Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.'

ABRAM AND THE LIFE OF FAITH

II

A GREAT act of renunciation at the divine call lies at the foundation of Israel's history, as it does at the foundation of every life that blesses the world or is worth living. The divine Word to Abram first gives the command in all its authoritativeness and plain setting forth of how much had to be surrendered, and then in its exuberant setting forth of how much was to be won by obedience. God does not hide the sacrifices that have to be made if we will be true to His command. He will enlist no recruits on false pretences. All ties of country, kindred, and father's house have to be loosened, and, if need be, to be cut, for His command is to be supreme, and clinging hands that would hold back the pilgrim have to be disengaged. If a man realises God's hold on him, he feels all others relaxed. The magnetism of the divine command overcomes gravitation, and lifts him high above earth. The life of faith ever begins as that of 'the Father of the Faithful' began, with the solemn recognition of a divine will which separates. Further, Abram saw plainly what he had to leave, but not what he was to win. He had to make a venture of faith, for 'the land that I will shew thee' was undefined. Certainly it was somewhere, but where was it? He had to fling away substance for what seemed shadow to all but the eye of faith, as we all have to do. The familiar, undeniable good of the present has to be waived in favour of what 'common sense' calls a misty possibility in the future. To part with solid acres and get nothing but hopes of an inheritance in the skies looks like insanity, and is the only true wisdom. 'Get thee out' is plain; 'the land that I will shew thee' looks like the doubtful outlines seen from afar at sea, which may be but clouds.

But Abram had a great hope blazing in front, none the less bright or guiding because it all rested on the bare promise of God. It is the prerogative of faith to give solidity and reality to what the world thinks has neither. The wanderer who had left his country was to receive a land for his own; the solitary who had left his kindred was to become the founder of a nation; the unknown stranger was to win a great name, — and how wonderfully that has come true! Not only was he to be blessed, but also to be a blessing, for from him was to flow that which should bless all the earth,—and how transcendently that has come true! The attitude of men to him (and to the universal blessing that should descend from him) was to determine their position in reference to God and 'blessings' or 'cursings' from him. So the migration of Abram was a turning-point in universal history.

Obedience followed the command, immediate as the thunder on the flash, and complete. 'So Abram went, as the Lord had spoken unto him,'—blessed they of whose lives that may be the summing-up! Happy the life which has God's command at the back of every deed, and no command of His unobeyed! If our acts are closely parallel with God's speech to us, they will prosper, and we shall be peaceful wherever we may have to wander. Success followed obedience in Abram's case, as in deepest truth it always does. That is a pregnant expression: 'They went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.' A strange itinerary of a journey, which omits all but the start and the finish! And yet are these not the most important points in any journey or life,—whither it was directed and where it arrived? How little will the weary tramps in the desert be remembered when the goal has been reached! Dangers and privations soon pass from memory, and we shall think little of sorrows, cares, and pains, when we arrive at home. The life of faith is the only one which is always sure of getting to the place to which it seeks to journey. Others miss their aim, or drop dead on the road, like the early emigrants out West; Christian lives get to the city.

Once in the land, Abram was still a stranger and pilgrim. He first planted himself in its heart by Sichem, but outside the city, under the terebinth tree of Moreh. The reason for his position is given in the significant statement that 'the Canaanite was then in the land.' So he had to live in the midst of an alien civilisation, and yet keep apart from it. As Hebrews says, he was 'dwelling in tabernacles,' because he 'looked for a city.' The hope of the permanent future made him keep clear of the passing present; and we are to feel ourselves pilgrims and sojourners, not so much because earth is fleeting and we are mortal, as because our true affinities are with the unseen and eternal But the presence of 'the Canaanite' is connected also with the following words, which tell that 'the Lord appeared unto Abram,' and now after his obedience told him that this was the land that was to be his. He unfolds His purposes to those who keep His commandments; obedience is the mother of insight. The revelation put a further strain on faith, for the present occupiers of the land were many and strong; but it matters not how formidably and firmly rooted the Canaanite is, God's children can be sure that the promise will be fulfilled. We can calmly look on his power and reckon on its decay, if the Lord appears to us, as to Abram—and He surely will if we have followed His separating voice, and dwell as strangers here, because our hearts are with Him.

After the appearance of God and the promise, we have an outline of the pilgrim's life, as seen in Abram. He signalised God's further opening of His purposes, by building an altar on the place where He had been seen by him. Thankful recognition and commemoration of the times in our lives when He has most plainly drawn near and shown us glimpses of His will, are no less blessed than due, and they who thus rear altars to Him will wonder, when they come to count up how many they have had to build. But the life of faith is ever a pilgrim life, and Bethel has soon to be the home instead of Shechem. There, too, Abram keeps outside the city, and pitches his tent. There, too, the altar rises by the side of the tent. The transitory provision for housing the pilgrim contrasts with the solid structure for offering sacrifices. The tent is 'pitched,' and may be struck and carried away to-morrow, but the altar is 'builded.' That part of our lives which is concerned with the material and corporeal is, after all, short in duration and small in importance; that which has to do with God, His revelations, and His worship and service, lasts. What is left in ancient historic lands, like Egypt or Greece, is the temples of the gods, while the huts of the people have perished long centuries ago. What we build for God lasts; what we pitch for ourselves is transient as we are.

GOING FORTH

'They went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan they came.'—GENESIS xii. 5.

I

THE reference of these words is to Abram's act of faith in leaving Haran and setting out on his pilgrimage. It is a strange narrative of a journey, which omits the journey altogether, with its weary marches, privations, and perils, and notes but its beginning and its end. Are not these the main points in every life, its direction and its attainment? There are—

> 'Two points in the adventure of the diver,
> One—when, a beggar, he prepares to plunge,
> One—when, a prince, he rises with his pearl.'

Abram and his company had a clear aim. But does not the Epistle to the Hebrews magnify him precisely because he 'went out, not knowing whither he went'? Both statements are true, for Abram had the same combination of knowledge and ignorance as we all have. He knew that he was to go to a land that he should afterwards inherit, and he knew that, in the first place, Canaan was to be his 'objective point,' but he did not know, till long after he had crossed the Euphrates and pitched his tent by Bethel, that it was the land. The ultimate goal was clear, and the first step towards it was plain, but how that first step was related to the goal was not plain, and all the steps between were unknown. He went forth with sealed orders, to go to a certain place, where he would have further instructions. He knew that he was to go to Canaan, and beyond that point all was dark, except for the sparkle of the great hope that gleamed on the horizon in front, as a sunlit summit rises above a sea of mist between it and the traveller. Like such a traveller, Abram could not accurately tell how far off the shining peak was, nor where, in the intervening gorges full of mist, the path lay; but he plunged into the darkness with a good heart, because he had caught a glimpse of his journey's end. So with us. We may have clear before us the ultimate aim and goal of our lives, and also the step which we have to take now, in pressing towards it, while between these two there stretches a valley full of mist, the breadth of which may be measured by years or by hours, for all that we know, and the rough places and green pastures of which are equally hidden from us. We have to be sure that the mountain peak far ahead, with the sunshine bathing it, is not delusive cloud but solid reality, and we have to make sure that God has bid us step out on the yard of path which we *can* see, and, having secured these two certainties, we are to cast ourselves into the obscurity before us, and to bear in our hearts the vision of the end, to cheer us amid the difficulties of the road.

Life is strenuous, fruitful, and noble, in the measure in which its ultimate aim is kept clearly visible throughout it all. Nearer aims, prescribed by physical necessities, tastes, circumstances, and the like, are clear enough, but a melancholy multitude of us have never reflected on the further question: 'What then?' Suppose I have made my fortune, or won my wife, or established my position, or achieved a reputation, behind all these successes lies the larger question. These are not ends but means, and it is fatal to treat them as being the goal of our efforts or the chief end of our being. There would be fewer wrecked lives, and fewer bitter and disappointed old men, if there were more young ones who, at starting, put clearly before themselves the question: 'What am I living for? and what am I going to do when I have secured the nearer aims necessarily prescribed to me?'

What that aim should be is not doubtful. The only worthy end befitting creatures with hearts, minds, consciences, and wills like ours is God Himself. Abram's 'Canaan' is usually regarded as an emblem of heaven, and that is correct, but the land of our inheritance is not wholly beyond the river, for God is the portion of our hearts. He *is* heaven. To dwell with Him, to have all the current of our being running towards Him, to set Him before us in the strenuous hours of effort and in the quiet moments of repose, in the bright and in the dark days, are the conditions of blessedness, strength, and peace.

That aim clearly apprehended and persistently pursued gives continuity to life, such as nothing else can do. How many of the things that drew us to themselves, and were for a while the objects of desire and effort, have sunk below the horizon! The lives that are not directed to God as their chief end are like the voyages of old-time sailors, who had to creep from one headland to another, and steer for points which, one after another, were reached, left behind, and forgotten. There is only one aim so great, so far in advance that we can never reach, and therefore can never pass and drop it. Life then becomes a chain, not a heap of unrelated fragments. That aim made ours, stimulates effort to its highest point, and therefore secures blessedness. It emancipates from many bonds, and takes the poison out of the mosquito bites of small annoyances, and the stings of great sorrows. It gleams ever before a man, sufficiently attained to make him at rest, sufficiently unattained to give the joy of progress. The pilgrims who had but one single aim, 'to go to the land of Canaan,' were delivered from the miseries of conflicting desires, and with simplicity of aim came concentration of force and calm of spirit.

COMING IN

II

If life has a clear, definite aim, and especially if its aim is the highest, there will be detachment from, and abandonment of, many lower ones. Nothing worth doing is done, and nothing worth being is realised in ourselves, except on condition of resolutely ignoring much that attracts. 'They went forth'; Haran must be given up if Canaan is to be reached. Artists are content to pay the price for mastery in their art, students think it no hardship to remain ignorant of much in order to know their own subject thoroughly; men of business feel it no sacrifice to give up culture, leisure, and sometimes still higher things, such as love and purity, to win wealth. And we shall not be Christians after Christ's heart unless we practise similar restrictions. The stream that is to flow with impetus sufficient to scour its bed clear of obstructions must not be allowed to meander in side branches, but be banked up in one channel. Sometimes there must be actual surrender and outward withdrawal from lower aims which, by our weakness, have become rival aims; always there must be subordination and detachment in heart and mind. The compass in an iron ship is disturbed by the iron, unless it has been adjusted; the golden apples arrest the runner, and there are clogs and weights in every life, which have to be laid aside if the race is to be won. The old pilgrim fashion is still the only way. We must do as Abram did: leave Haran and its idols behind us, and go forth, ready to dwell, if need be, in deserts, and as sojourners even when among cities, or we shall not reach the 'land that is very far off.' It is near us if we forsake self and the 'things seen and temporal,' but it recedes when we turn our hearts to these.

'Into the land of Canaan they came.' No man honestly and rightly seeks God and fails to find Him. No man has less goodness and Christ-likeness than he truly desires and earnestly pursues. Nearer aims are often missed, and it is well that they should be. We should thank God for disappointments, for hopes unfulfilled, or proving still greater disappointments when fulfilled. It is mercy that often makes the harvest from our sowing a scanty one, for so we are being taught to turn from the quest in which searching has no assurance of finding, to that in which to seek is to find. 'I have never said to any of the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain.' We may not reach other lands which seem to us to be lands of promise, or when we do, may find that the land is 'evil and naughty,' but this land we shall reach, if we desire it, and if, desiring it, we go forth from this vain world. The Christian life is the only one which has no failures, no balked efforts, no frustrated aims, no brave settings out and defeated returnings. The literal meaning of one of the Old Testament words for *sin* is missing the mark, and that embodies the truth that no man wins what he seeks who seeks satisfaction elsewhere than in God. Like the rivers in Asiatic deserts, which are lost in the sand and never reach the sea, all lives which flow towards anything but God are dissipated and vain.

But the supreme realisation of an experience like Abram's is reserved for another life. No pilgrim Zionward perishes in the wilderness, or loses his way or fails to come to 'the city of habitation.' 'They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.' And when they appear there, they will think no more, just as this narrative says nothing, of the sandy, salt, waterless wildernesses, or the wearinesses, dangers, and toils of the road. The experience of the happy travellers, who have found all which they sought and are at home for ever in the fatherland towards which they journeyed, will all be summed up in this, that 'they went forth to go into the land of Canaan, and into the land of Canaan they came.'

THE MAN OF FAITH

'And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. And the Lord appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the Lord, who appeared unto him.'—GENESIS xii. 6, 7.

GREAT epoch and man. Steps of Abram's training. First he was simply called to go—no promise of inheritance—obeyed—came to Canaan—found a thickly peopled land with advanced social order, and received no divine vision till he was face to face with the Canaanite.

1. *God's bit-by-bit leading of us.*

How slowly the divine purpose was revealed—the trial before the promise—did not know where, nor that Canaan was land, but only told enough for his first march.

So with us—our ignorance of future is meant to have the effect of keeping us near God and training us to live a day at a time.

God's finger on the page points to a word at a time. Each day's route is given morning by morning in the order for the day.

2. *Obedience often brings us into very difficult places.*

Abram was ready to say, no doubt, 'This cannot be the land for me, peopled as it is with all these Canaanites.' We are ever ready to think that, if we find obstacles, we must have misunderstood God's directions, but 'many adversaries' often indicate an 'open door.'

3. *The presence of enemies brings the presence of God.*

This is the first time we read that God *appeared* to men.

As the darkness thickens, the pillar of fire brightens. But not only does God appear more clearly, but our spirits are more eager and therefore able to see Him. We are mercifully left to feel the enemies before we see Him present in His strength.

4. *The victory for us lies in the vision of God and of His loving purpose.*

How superb the confidence of 'Unto thy seed will I give *this* land.'

That vision is our true strength. And it will make us feel as pilgrims, which is in itself more than half the battle.

LIFE IN CANAAN

'And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Beth-el, and pitched his tent, having Beth-el on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the Lord, and called upon the name of the Lord.'

GENESIS xii. 8.

THESE are the two first acts of Abram in the land of Canaan.

1. *All life should blend earthly and heavenly.*

They are not to be separated. Religion should run through everything and take the whole of life for its field. Where we cannot carry it is no place for us. It is a shame that heathenism should be more penetrated by its religion than Christendom is.

2. *The family should be a church.*

Domestic religion. New Testament households. Abram a priest. The decay of family religion, worship, and instruction.

3. *The service to God should be more costly than to ourselves.*

Pitching a tent cheaper than building an altar. Give God the best. We build ourselves ceiled houses and the ark dwells in curtains. Pagans build elaborate temples, but their houses are hovels. Too many Christians do the opposite.

4. *Building for God lasts, for selves perishes.*

A tent is stricken, and no trace remains but embers. The stones of Jacob's altar may be standing yet. The Parthenon of Athens remains: where are the hovels of the people? 'He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.' Permanent results of transitory deeds.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A CHOICE

'And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south. And Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold. And he went on his journeys from the south even to Beth-el, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Beth-el and Hai; Unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the Lord. And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents. And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle and the herdmen of Lot's cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land. And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left. And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar. Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other. Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom. But the men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly.'—GENESIS xiii. 1-13.

THE main lesson of this section is the wisdom of seeking spiritual rather than temporal good. That is illustrated on both sides. Prosperity attends Abram and Lot while they think more of obeying God than of flocks and herds. Lot makes a mistake, as far as this world is concerned, when he chooses his place of abode for the sake of its material advantages. But the introductory verses (vv. 1-4) suggest a question, and seem to teach an important lesson. Was Abram right in so soon leaving the land to which God had led him, and going down to Egypt? Was that not taking the bit between his teeth? He had been commanded to go to Canaan; should he not have stopped there—famine or no famine—till the same authority commanded him to leave the land? If God had put him there, should he not have trusted God to keep him alive in famine? The narrative seems to imply that his going to Egypt was a failure of faith. It gives no hint of a divine voice leading him thither. We do not hear that he builded any altar beside his tent there, as he had done in the happier days of life by trust. His stay resulted in peril and in something very like lying, for which he had to bear the disgrace of being rebuked by an idolater, and having no word of excuse to offer. The great lesson of the whole section, and indeed of Abram's whole life, receives fresh illustration from the story thus understood, which preaches loudly that trust is safety and wellbeing, and that it is always sin and always folly to leave Canaan, where God has put us, even if there be a famine, and to go down into Egypt, even if its harvests be abundant.

But another lesson is also taught. After the interruption of the Egyptian journey, Abram had to begin all his Canaan life over again. Very emphatically the narrative puts it, that he went to 'the place where his tent had been at the beginning,' to the altar which he had made at the first. Yes! that is the only place for a man who has faltered and gone aside from the course of obedience. He must begin over again. The backsliding Christian has to resort anew to the place of the penitent, and to come to Christ, as he did at first for pardon. It is a solemn thought that years of obedience and heroisms of self-surrender, may be so annihilated by some act of self-seeking distrust that the whole career has, as it were, to be begun anew from the very starting-point. It is a blessed thought that, however far and long we may have wandered, we can always return to the place where we were at the beginning, and there call on the name of the Lord.

Note how we are taught here the great truth for the Old Testament, that outward prosperity follows most surely those who do not seek for it. Abram's wealth has increased, and his companion, Lot, has shared in the prosperity. It is because he 'went with Abram' that he 'had flocks, and herds, and tents.' Of course, the connection between despising the world and possessing it is not thus close in New Testament times. But even now, one often sees that the men who *will* be rich fall into a pit of poverty, and that a heart set on higher things, which counts earthly advantages second and not first, wins a sufficiency of these most surely. Foxlike cunning, and wolf-like rapacity, and Devil-like selfishness, which make up a large portion of what the world calls 'great business capacity,' do not always secure the prize. But the real possession of earth and all its wealth depends to-day, as much as ever it did in Abram's times, on seeking 'first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness.' Only when we are Christ's are all things ours. They are ours, not by the vulgar way of what the world calls ownership, but in proportion as we use them to the highest ends of helping us to grow in wisdom and Christ-likeness, in the measure in which we subordinate them to heavenly good, in the degree in which we employ them as means of serving Christ. We can see the Pleiades best by not looking directly at, but somewhat away from, them; and just as pleasure, if made the direct object of life, ceases to be pleasure, so the world's goods, if taken for our chief aim, cease to yield even the imperfect good which they can bestow.

But now we have to look at the two dim figures which the remainder of this story presents to us, and which shine there, in that far-off past, types and instances of the two great classes into which men are divided,—Abram, the man of faith; Lot, the man of sense.

Mark the conduct of the man of faith. Why should he, who has God's promise that all the land is his, squabble with his kinsman about pasture and wells? The herdsmen naturally would come to high words and blows, especially as the available land was diminished by the claims of the 'Canaanite and Perizzite.' But the direct effect of Abram's faith was to make him feel that the matter in dispute was too small to warrant a quarrel. A soul truly living in the contemplation of the future, and filled with God's promises, will never be eager to insist on its rights, or to stand on its dignity, and will take too accurate a measure of the worth of things temporal to get into a heat about them. The clash of conflicting interests, and the bad blood bred by them, seem infinitely small, when we are up on the height of communion with God. An acre or two more or less of grass land does not look all-important, when our vision of the city which hath foundations is clear. So an elevated calm and 'sweet reasonableness' will mark the man who truly lives by faith, and he will seek after the things that make for peace. Abram could fight, as Old Testament morality permitted, when occasion arose, as Lot found out to his advantage before long. But he would not strive about such trifles.

May we not venture to apply his words to churches and sects? They too, if they have faith strong and dominant, will not easily fall out with one another about intrusions on each other's territory, especially in the presence, as at this day, of the common foe. When the Canaanite and the Perizzite are in the land, and Unbelief in militant forms is arrayed against us, it is more than folly, it is sin, for brethren to be turning their weapons against each other. The common foe should make them stand shoulder to shoulder.

Abram's faith led, too, to the noble generosity of his proposal. The elder and superior gives the younger and inferior the right of option, and is quite willing to take Lot's leavings. Right or left—it mattered not to him; God would be with him, whichever way he went; and the glorious Beyond, for which he lived, blazed too bright before his inward sight to let him be very solicitous where he was. 'I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.' It does not matter much what accommodation we have on shipboard, when the voyage is so short. If our thoughts are stretching across the sea to the landing at home, and the welcome there, we shall not fight with our fellow-passengers about our cabins or places at the table. And notice what rest comes when faith thus dwindles the worth of the momentary arrangements here. The less of our energies are consumed in asserting ourselves, and scrambling for our rights, and cutting in before other people, so as to get the best places for ourselves, the more we shall have to spare for better things; and the more we live in the future, and leave God to order our ways, the more shall our souls be wrapped in perfect peace.

Mark the conduct of the man of sense. We can fancy the two standing on the barren hills by Bethel, from one of which, as travellers tell us, there is precisely the view which Lot saw. He lifted up his greedy eyes, and there, at his feet, lay that strange Jordan valley with its almost tropical richness, its dark lines of foliage telling of abundant water, the palm-trees of Jericho perhaps, and the glittering cities. Up there among the hills there was little to tempt,—rocks and scanty herbage; down below, it was like the lost Eden, or the Egypt from which they had but lately come

What need for hesitation? True, the men of the plain were 'wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly,' as the chapter says with grim emphasis. But Lot evidently never thought about that. He knew it, though, and ought to have thought about it. It was his sin that he was guided in his choice only by considerations of temporal advantage. Put his action into words, and it says, 'Grass for my sheep is more to me than fellowship with God, and a good conscience.' No doubt he would have had salves enough. 'I do not need to become like them, though I live among them.' 'A man must look after his own interests.' 'I can serve God down there as well as up here.' Perhaps he even thought that he might be a missionary among these sinners. But at bottom he did not seek first the kingdom of God, but the other things.

We have seldom the choice put before us so dramatically and sharply; but it is as really presented to each. There is the shameless cynicism of the men who avowedly only ask the question, 'Will it pay?' But there are subtler forms which affect us all. It is the standing temptation of Englishmen to apply a money standard to everything, to adopt courses of action of which the only recommendation is that they promote getting on in the world. Men who call themselves Christians select schools for their children, or professions for their boys, or marriages for their daughters, down in Sodom, because it will give them a lift in life which they would not get up in the starved pastures at Bethel, with nobody but Abram and his like to associate with. If the earnestness with which men pursue an end is to be taken as any measure of its importance in their eyes, it certainly does not look much as if modern average Christians did believe that it was of more moment to be united to God, and to be growing like Him, than to secure a good large share of earthly possessions. Tried by the test of conduct, their faith in getting on is a great deal deeper than their faith in getting up. But if our religion does not make us put the world beneath our feet, and count all things but loss that we may win Christ, we had better ask ourselves whether our religion is any better than Lot's, which was second-hand, and was much more imitation of Abram than obedience to God.

Lot teaches us that material good may tempt and conquer, even after it has once been overcome. His early life had been heroic; in his young enthusiasm, he had thrown in his portion with Abram in his great venture. He had not been thinking of his flocks when he left Haran. Probably, as I have just said, he was a good deal galvanised into imitation; but still, he had chosen the better part. But now he has tired of a pilgrim's life. There are men who cut down the thorns, and in whom the seed is sown; but thorns are tenacious of life, and quick growing, and so they spread over the field and choke the seed. It is easier to take some one bold step than to keep true through life to its spirit. Youth contemns, but too often middle-age worships, worldly success. The world tightens its grasp as we grow older, and Lot and Demas teach us that it is hard to keep for a lifetime on the heights. Faith, strong and ever renewed by communion, can do it; nothing else can.

Lot's history teaches what comes of setting the world first, and God's kingdom second. For one thing, the association with it is sure to get closer. Lot began with choosing the plain; then he crept a little nearer, and pitched his tent 'towards' Sodom; next time we hear of him, he is living in the city, and mixed up inextricably with its people. The first false step leads on to connections unforeseen, from which the man would have shrunk in horror, if he had been told that he would make them. Once on the incline, time and gravity will settle how far down we go. We shall see, in subsequent sections, how far Lot's own moral character suffered from his choice. But we may so far anticipate the future narrative as to point out that it affords a plain instance of the great truth that the sure way to lose the world as well as our own souls, is to make it our first object. He would have been safe if he had stopped up among the hills. The shadowy Eastern kings who swooped down on the plain would never have ventured up there. But when we choose the world for our portion, we lay ourselves open to the full weight of all the blows which change and fortune can inflict, and come voluntarily down from an impregnable fastness to the undefended open.

Nor is this all; but at the last, when the fiery rain bursts on the doomed city, Lot has to leave all the wealth for which he has sacrificed conscience and peace, and escapes with bare life; he suffers loss even if he himself is 'saved as dragged through the fire.' The world passeth away and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. The riches which wax not old, and need not to be left when we leave all things besides, are surely the treasures which the calmest reason dictates should be our chief aim. God is the true portion of the soul; if we have Him, we have all. So, let us seek Him first, and, with Him, all else is ours.

ABRAM THE HEBREW

'And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew.'
GENESIS xiv. 13.

THIS is a singular designation of Abram as 'The Hebrew.' Probably we have in its use here a trace of the customary epithet which he bore among the inhabitants of Canaan, and perhaps the presence of the name in this narrative may indicate the influence of some older account, traditional or written, which owed its authorship to some of them. At all events, this is the first appearance of the name in Scripture. As we all know, it has become that of the nation, but a Jew did not call himself a 'Hebrew' except in intercourse with foreigners. As in many other cases, the national name used by other nations was not that by which the people called themselves. Here, obviously, it is not a national name, for the very good reason that there was no nation then. It is a personal epithet, or, in plain English, a nickname, and it means, probably, as the ancient Greek translation of Genesis gives it, neither more nor less than 'The man from the other side,' the man that had come across the water. Just as a mediæval prince bore the *sobriquet* Outremere—the 'man from beyond the sea'—so Abram, to the aboriginal, or, at least, long-settled, inhabitants of the country, was known simply as the foreigner, the 'man from the other side' (of the Jordan, or more probably of the great river Euphrates), the man from across the water.

Now that name may suggest, with a permissible, and, I hope, not misleading play of fancy, just two things, which I seek now to press upon our hearts and consciences. The one is as to how men become Christians, and the other is as to how they look to other people when they are.

1. Men become Christians by a great emigration.

'Get thee out from thy father's house, and from thy country, and from thy kindred,' was the command to Abram. And he became the heir to God's promises and the father of the faithful, because he did not hesitate a moment to make the plunge and to leave behind him all his past, his associations, his loves, much of his possessions, and, in a very profound sense, his old self, and put a great impassable gulf between him and them all.

Now I am not going to say anything so narrow or foolish as that the Christian life must always begin with a conscious and sudden change; but this I am quite sure of, that in the vast majority of cases of thoroughly and out-and-out religious men, there must be a conscious change, whether it has been diffused through months or years, or concentrated in one burning moment. There has been a beginning; whether it has been like the dawn, or whether it has been like the kindling of a candle, the beginning of the flashing of the divine light into the heart; and the men that are most really under the influence of religious truth can, as a rule, looking back upon their past experience, see that it divides itself into two halves, separated from each other by a profound gulf—the time on the other side, and that on this side, of the great river. We must take heed lest by insisting on any one way of entrance into the kingdom we seem to narrow God's mercy, or sadden true hearts, or make the method of approach a test of the fact of entrance. God's city has more than twelve gates; they open to all the thirty-two points of the compass, yet there is, in the religious experience of the truest saints, always something analogous to this change. And what I desire to press upon you is, that unless you are only religious people after the popular superficial fashion of the day, there will be something like it in your lives.

There will be a change in a man's deepest self, so that he will be a 'new creature,' with new tastes, new motives stirring to action, new desires pressing for satisfaction, new loves sweetly filling his heart, new insight into the meanings and true good of life and time guiding his conduct, new aversions withdrawing him from old delights which have become hateful now, new hopes pluming their growing wings, and new powers bearing him along a new road. There will be a change in his relations to God and to God's will. God in Christ will have become his centre, instead of self, which was so before. He lives in a new world, being himself a new man.

Our Lord uses this very illustration when He says, 'He that heareth My Word, and believeth Him that sent Me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life.' That is a great migration, is it not, from the condition of a corpse to that of a living man? Paul, too, gives the same idea with a somewhat different turn of the illustration, when he gives 'thanks to the Father who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of,'—not, as we might expect to complete the antithesis, 'the light,' but—the 'kingdom of the Son of His love,' which is the same thing as the light. The illustration is probably drawn from the practice of the ancient conquering monarchs, who, when they subjugated a country, were wont to lead away captive long files of its inhabitants as compulsory colonists, and set them down in another land. Thus the conquering Christ comes, and those whom He conquers by His love, He shifts by a great emigration out of the dominion of that darkness which is at once tyranny and anarchy, and leads them into the happy kingdom of the light.

Thus, then, all Christian men become such, because they turn their backs upon their old selves, and 'crucify their affections and lusts'; and paste down the leaf, as it were, on which their blotted past is writ, and turn over a new and a fairer one. And my question to you, dear brethren, is, Are you 'men from the other side,' who were not born where you live now, and who have passed out of the native Chaldea into the foreign—and yet to the new self home—land of union with God?

2. This designation may be taken as teaching that a Christian should be known as a foreigner, a man from across the water.

Everybody in Canaan that knew Abram at all knew him as not one of themselves. The Hebrew was the name he went by, because his unlikeness to the others was the most conspicuous thing about him, even to the shallowest eye. Abram found himself, when he had migrated into Canaan, in no barbarous country, but plunged at once into the midst of an organised and compact civilisation, that walled its cities, and had the comforts and conveniences and regularities of a settled order; and in the midst of it all, what did he do? He elected to live in a tent. 'He dwelt in tabernacles,' as the Epistle to the Hebrews comments upon his history, 'because he looked for a city.' The more his expectations were fixed upon a permanent abode, the more transitory did he make his abode here. If there had been no other city to fill his eyes, he would have gone and lived in some of those that were in the land. If there had been no other order to which he felt himself to belong, he would have had no objection to cast in his lot with the order and the people with whom he lived on friendly terms. But although he bought and sold with them, and fought for them and by their sides, and acquired from them land in which to bury his dead, he was not one of them, but said, 'No! I am not going into your city. I stay in my tent under this terebinth tree; for I am here as a stranger and a sojourner.' No doubt there were differences of language, dress, and a hundred other little things which helped the impression made on the men of the land by this strange visitor who lived in amity but in separation, and they are all crystallised in the name which the popular voice gave him, 'The man from the other side.'

That is the impression which Christian people ought to make in the world. They should be recognised, by even unobservant eyes who know nothing of the inner secret of their lives, as plainly belonging to another order. If we seek to keep fresh in our own minds the consciousness that we do so, it will make itself manifest in all our bearing and actions. So that exhortation to cultivate the continual sense that our true city—the mother city of our hearts and hopes—is in heaven, is ever to be reiterated, and as constantly obeyed, as the necessary condition of a life worthy of our true affinities and of our glorious hopes.

Nor less needful is the other exhortation—live by the laws of your own land, not by those of the foreign country where you are for a time. If you do that thoroughly, you will not need to say, 'I am from another country.' Your conduct will say it for you. An English ship is a bit of England, in whatever latitude it may be, and however far beyond the three-mile limit of the King's authority upon the seas it may float. And so, wherever there is a Christian man, there is a bit of God's kingdom, and over that little speck in the midst of the ocean of the world the flag with the Cross on it should fly, and the laws of the Christ should be the only laws that have currency. If it could be said of us as Haman said to his king about the Jews, that we were a people with laws 'diverse from those of all people,' we should be doing more than, alas! most of us do, to honour Him whom we profess to serve. Follow Christ, and people will be quick enough to say of you 'The man from the other side,' 'He does not belong to our city.' There is no need for ostentation, nor for saying, 'Come and see my zeal for the Lord,' nor for blowing trumpets before us at street corners or elsewhere. The less of all that the better. The more we try to do the common things done by the folk round us, but from another motive, the more powerful will be our witness for our Master.

For instance, when John Knox was in the French galleys, he was fastened to the same oar with some criminal, perhaps a murderer. The two men sat on the same bench, did the same work, tugged at the same heavy sweep, were fed with the same food, suffered the same sorrows. Do you think there was any doubt as to the infinite gulf between them? We may be working side by side, at the very same tasks, and under similar circumstances, with men that have no share in our faith, and no sympathy with our hopes and aspirations, and yet, though doing the same thing, it will *not* be the same thing. And if we keep Christ before us, and follow His steps who has left us an example, depend upon it people will very soon find out that we are men 'from across the water.'

Notice, further, how this dissimilarity and obvious aloofness from the order of things in which we dwell is still perfectly compatible with all sorts of helpful associations. The context shows us that. There had come a flood of invasion, under kings with strange and barbarous names, from the far East. They had swept down upon the fertile valley of Siddim, and there had inflicted devastation. Amongst the captives had been Lot, Abram's relative, and all his goods had been taken. One fugitive, as it appears, had escaped, and the first thing he did was to go straight to 'the man from the other side,' and tell him about it, as if sure of sympathy and help. No doubt the relationship between Abram and Lot was the main reason why the panting survivor made his way to the hills where Abram's tent was pitched, but there was also confidence in his willingness to help the Sodomites who had lost their goods. So it was not to the sons of Heth in Mamre that the fugitive turned in his extremity, but he 'told Abram the Hebrew.'

I need not narrate over again the familiar story of how, for once in his peaceful life, the 'friend of God' girds on his sword and develops military instincts in his prompt and well-planned pursuit, which show that if he did not try to conquer some part of the land which he knew to be his by the will of God, it was not for want of ability, but because he 'believed God,' and could wait. We all know how he armed his slaves, and made a swift march to the northern extremity of the land, and then, by a nocturnal surprise, came down upon the marauders and scattered them like chaff, before his onset, and recovered Lot and all the spoil.

Let us learn that, if Christian men will live well apart from the world, they will be able to sympathise with and help the world; and that our religion should fit us for the prompt and heroic undertaking, as it certainly does for the successful accomplishment, of all deeds of brotherly kindness and sympathy, bringing help and solace to the weak and the wearied, liberty to the captives, and hope to the despairing.

I do not believe that Christian men have any business to draw swords now. Abram is in that respect the Old Testament type of a God-fearing hero, with the actual sword in his hands. The New Testament type of a Christian warrior without a sword is not one jot less, but more, heroic. The form of sympathy, help, and 'public spirit' which the 'man from the other side' displayed is worse than an anachronism now in the light of Christ's law. It is a contradiction. But the spirit which breathed through Abram's conduct should be ours. We are bound to 'seek the peace of the city' where we dwell as strangers and pilgrims, avoiding no duty of sympathy and help, but by prompt, heroic, self-forgetting service to all the needy, sorrowful, and oppressed, building up such characters for ourselves that fugitives and desperate men shall instinctively turn to men from the other side for that help which, they know full well, the men of the country are too selfish or cowardly to give.

May I venture to suggest yet another and very different application of this name? To the aboriginal inhabitants of heaven, the angels that kept their first estate, redeemed men are possessors of a unique experience; and are the 'men from the other side.' They who entered on their pilgrimage through the Red Sea of conversion, pass out of it through the Jordan of death. They who become Christ's, by the great change of yielding their hearts to Him, and who live here as pilgrims and sojourners, pass dryshod through the stream into His presence. And there they who have always dwelt in the sunny highlands of the true Canaan, gather round them, and call them, not unenvying, perhaps, their experience, 'The men that have crossed.' The 'Hebrews of the Hebrews' in the heavens are those who have known what it is to be pilgrims and sojourners, and to whom the promise has been fulfilled in the last hour of their journey, 'When thou passest through the river, I will be with thee.' *They* teach the angels a new song who sing, 'Thou hast led us through fire and through water, and brought us into a wealthy place.'

GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAM

'And He brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness. And He said unto him, I am the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it. And he said, Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it? And He said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not. And when the fowls came down upon the carcases, Abram drove them away And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him. And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not their's, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces. In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates.'—GENESIS xv. 5-18.

1. ABRAM had exposed himself to dangerous reprisals by his victory over the confederate Eastern raiders.

In the reaction following the excitement of battle, dread and despondency seem to have shadowed his soul. Therefore the assurance with which this chapter opens came to him. It was new, and came in a new form. He is cast into a state of spiritual ecstasy, and a mighty 'word' sounds, audible to his inward ear. The form which it takes—'I am thy shield'—suggests the thought that God shapes His revelation according to the moment's need. The unwarlike Abram might well dread the return of the marauders in force, to avenge their defeat. Therefore God speaks to his fears and present want. Just as to Jacob the angels appeared as a heavenly camp guarding his undefended tents and helpless women; so, here and always, God is to us what we most need at the moment, whether it be comfort, or wisdom, or guidance, or strength. The manna tasted to each man, as the rabbis say, what he most desired. God's gifts take the shape of man's necessity.

Abram had just exercised singular generosity in absolutely refusing to enrich himself from the spoil. God reveals Himself as 'his exceeding great reward.' He gives Himself as recompense for all sacrifices. Whatever is given up at His bidding, 'the Lord is able to give thee much more than this.' Not outward things, nor even an outward heaven, is the guerdon of the soul; but a larger possession of Him who alone fills the heart, and fills the heart alone. Other riches may be counted, but this is 'exceeding great,' passing comprehension, and ever unexhausted, and having something over after all experience. Both these aspects of God's preciousness are true for earth; but we need a shield only while exposed to attack. In the land of peace, He is only our reward.

2. Mark the triumphant faith which springs to meet the divine promise. The first effect of that great assurance is to deepen Abram's consciousness of the strange contradiction to it apparently given by his childlessness. It is not distrust that answers the promise with a question, but it is eagerness to accept the assurance and ingenuous utterance of difficulties in the hope of their removal. God is too wise a father not to know the difference between the tones of confidence and unbelief, however alike they may sound; and He is too patient to be angry if we cannot take in all His promise at once. He breaks it into bits not too large for our lips, as He does here. The frequent reiterations of the same promises in Abram's life are not vain. They are a specimen of the unwearied repetition of our lessons, 'Here a little, there a little,' which our teacher gives His slow scholars. So, once more, Abram gets the promise of posterity in still more glorious form. Before, it was likened to the dust of the earth; now it is as the innumerable stars shining in the clear Eastern heaven. As he gazes up into the solemn depths, the immensity and peace of the steadfast sky seems to help him to rise above the narrow limits and changefulness of earth, and a great trust floods his soul. Abram had lived by faith ever since he left Haran; but the historian, usually so silent about the thoughts of his characters, breaks through his usual manner of narrative to insert the all-important words which mark an epoch in revelation, and are, in some aspects, the most significant in the Old Testament. Abram 'believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness.'

Observe the teaching as to the nature and object of faith in that first clause. The word rendered 'believed' literally means to steady oneself by leaning on something. So it gives in a vivid picture more instructive than many a long treatise what faith is, and what it does for us. As a man leans his trembling hand on a staff, so we lay our weak and changeful selves on God's strength; and as the most mutable thing is steadied by being fastened to a fixed point, so we, though in ourselves light as thistledown, may be steadfast as rock, if we are bound to the rock of ages by the living band of faith. The metaphor makes it plain that faith cannot be merely an intellectual act of assent, but must include a moral act, that of confidence. Belief as credence is mainly an affair of the head, but belief as trust is an act of the will and the affections.

The object of faith is set in sunlight clearness by these words,—the first in which Scripture speaks of faith. Abram leaned on 'the Lord.' It was not the promise, but the promiser, that was truly the object of Abram's trust. He believed the former, because he trusted Him who made it. Many confusions in Christian teaching would have been avoided if it had been always seen that faith grasps a person, not a doctrine, and that even when the person is revealed by doctrine, it is him, and not only it, which faith lays hold of. Whether God speaks promises, teachings of truth, or commandments, faith accepts them, because it trusts Him. Christ is revealed to us for our faith by the doctrinal statements of the New Testament. But we must grasp Himself, as so revealed, if we are to have faith which saves the soul. This same thought of the true object of faith as personal helps us to understand the substantial identity of faith in all ages and stages of revelation, however different the substance of the creeds. Abram knew very little of God, as compared with our knowledge. But it was the same God whom Abram trusted, and whom we trust as made known in His Son. Hence we can stretch out our hands across the ages, and clasp his as partaker of 'like precious faith.' We walk in the light of the same sun,—he in its morning beams, we in its noonday glory. There has never been but one road to God, and that is the road which Abram trod, when 'he believed in the Lord.'

3. Mark the full-orbed gospel truth as to the righteousness of faith which is embedded in this record of early revelation, 'He counted it to him for righteousness.' A geologist would be astonished if he came on remains in some of the primary strata which indicated the existence, in these remote epochs, of species supposed to be of much more recent date. So here we are startled at finding the peculiarly New Testament teaching away back in this dim distance. No wonder that Paul fastened on this verse, which so remarkably breaks the flow of the narrative, as proof that his great principle of justification by faith was really the one only law by which, in all ages, men had found acceptance with God. Long before law or circumcision, faith had been counted for righteousness. The whole Mosaic system was a parenthesis; and even in it, whoever had been accepted had been so because of his trust, not because of his works. The whole of the subsequent divine dealings with Israel rested on this act of faith, and on the relation to God into which, through it, Abram entered. He was not a perfectly righteous man, as some passages of his life show; but he rose here to the height of loving and yearning trust in God, and God took that trust in

lieu of perfect conformity to His will. He treated and regarded him as righteous, as is proved by the covenant which follows. The gospel takes up this principle, gives us a fuller revelation, presents the perfect righteousness of Christ as capable of becoming ours by faith, and so unveils the ground on which Abram and the latest generations are equally 'accepted in the beloved.' This reckoning of righteousness to the unrighteous, on condition of their faith, is not because of any merit in faith. It does not come about in reward of, but by means of, their faith, which is nothing in itself, but is the channel only of the blessing. Nor is it a mere arbitrary act of God's, or an unreal imputing of what is not. But faith unites with Christ; and 'he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit,' so as that 'in Him we have redemption.' His righteousness becomes ours. Faith grafts us into the living Vine, and we are no longer regarded in our poor sinful individual personality, but as members of Christ. Faith builds us into the rock; but He is a living Stone, and we are living stones, and the life of the foundation rises up through all the courses of the great temple. Faith unites sinful men to God in Christ; therefore it makes them partakers of the 'blessedness of the man, . . . to whom the Lord will not impute sin,' and of the blessedness of the man to whom the Lord reckons his faith for righteousness. That same faith which thus clothes us with the white robe of Christ's righteousness, in lieu of our own tattered raiment, also is the condition of our becoming righteous by the actual working out in our character of all things lovely and of good report. It opens the heart to the entrance of that divine Christ, who is first made *for* us, and then, by daily appropriation of the law of the spirit of life, is made *in* us, 'righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.' May all who read these lines 'be found in Him,' having 'that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith!'

4. Consider the covenant which is the consequence of Abram's faith, and the proof of his acceptance.

It is important to observe that the whole remainder of this chapter is regarded by the writer as the result of Abram's believing God. The way in which verse 7 and the rest are bolted on, as it were, to verse 6, clearly shows this. The nearer lesson from this fact is, that all the Old Testament revelation from this point onward rests on the foundation of faith. The further lesson, for all times, is that faith is ever rewarded by more intimate and loving manifestations of God's friendship, and by fuller disclosure of His purposes. The covenant is not only God's binding Himself anew by solemn acts to fulfil His promises already made, but it is His entering into far sweeter and nearer alliance with Abram than even He had hitherto had. That name, 'the friend of God,' by which he is still known over all the Mohammedan world, contains the very essence of the covenant. In old days men were wont to conclude a bond of closest amity by cutting their flesh and interchanging the flowing blood. Henceforth they had, as it were, one life. We have not here the shedding of Abram's blood, as in the covenant of circumcision. Still, the slain animals represent the parties to the covenant, and the notion of a resulting unity of the closest order as between God and Abram is the very heart of the whole incident.

The particulars as to the rite by which the covenant was established are profoundly illuminative. The significant division of the animals into two shows that they were regarded as representing the contracting parties, and the passing between them symbolised the taking up of the obligations of the covenant. This strange rite, which was widely spread, derives importance from the use of it probably made in Hebrews ix 16, 17. The new covenant, bringing still closer friendship and higher blessings, is sealed by the blood of Christ. He represents both God and man. In His death, may we not say that the manhood and the Godhead are parted, and we, standing as it were between them, encompassed by that awful sacrifice, and enclosed in its mysterious depths, enter into covenant with God, and become His friends?

We need not to dwell upon the detailed promises, of which the covenant was the seal. They are simply the fuller expansion of those already made, but now confirmed by more solemn guarantees. The new relation of familiar friendship, established by the covenant itself, is the main thing. It was fitting that God's friend should be in the secret of His purposes. 'The servant knoweth not what his lord doeth,' but the friend does. And so we have here the assurance that faith will pierce to the discernment of much of the mind of God, which is hid from sense and the wisdom of this world. If we would know, we must believe. We may be 'men of God's counsel,' and see deeply into the realities of the present, and far ahead into what will then become the certainties of the future, if only we live by faith in the secret place of the Most High, and, like John, lean so close on the Master's bosom that we can hear His lowest whisper.

Notice, too, the lessons of the smoking furnace and the blazing torch. They are like the pillar of fire and cloud. Darkness and light; a heart of fire and a wrapping of darkness,—these are not symbols of Israel and its checkered fate, as Dean Stanley thinks, but of the divine presence: they proclaim the double aspect of all divine manifestations, the double element in the divine nature. He can never be completely known; He is never completely hid. Ever does the lamp flame; ever around it the smoke wreathes. In all His self-revelation is 'the hiding of His power'; after all revelation He dwelleth 'in the thick darkness.' Only the smoke is itself fire, but not illumined to our vision. The darkness is light inaccessible. Much that was 'smoke' to Abram has caught fire, and is 'light' to us. But these two elements will ever remain; and throughout eternity God will be unknown, and yet well known, pouring Himself in ever-growing radiance on our eyes, and yet 'the King invisible.'

Nor is this all the teaching of the symbol. It speaks of that twofold aspect of the divine nature, by which to hearts that love He is gladsome light, and to unloving ones He is threatening darkness. As to the Israelites the pillar was light, and to the Egyptians darkness and terror; so the same God is joy to some, and dread to others. 'What maketh heaven, that maketh hell.' Light itself can become the source of pain the most exquisite, if the eye is diseased. God Himself cannot but be a torment to men who love darkness rather than light. Love and wrath, life and death, a God who pities and who cannot but judge, are solemnly proclaimed by that ancient symbol, and are plainly declared to us in the perfect revelation in Christ Jesus.

Observe, too, the manner of the ratification of the covenant. The symbol of the Divine presence passed between the pieces. No mention is made of Abram's doing so. Why this one-sided covenant? Because God's gracious dealings with men are one-sided. He seeks no oaths from us; He does not exchange blessings for our gifts. His covenant is the free result of His unmotived love, and is ratified by a solemn sacrifice, which we do not offer. We have nothing to do but to take what He gives. All ideas of barter and bargain are far from Him. Our part is but to embrace His covenant, which is complete and ratified whether we embrace it or not. What a wonderful thought that is of a covenant-making and a covenant-keeping God! We do not hear so much of it as our fathers did. The more is the pity. It means that God has, as it were, buoyed out across the boundless ocean of His possible modes of action a plain course, which He binds Himself to keep; that He has frankly let us into the very secret of His doings; that He has stooped to use human forms of assurance to make it easier to trust Him; that He has confirmed His promise by a mighty sacrifice. Therefore we may enter into closest friendship with Him, and take for our own the exultant swan-song of Abram's royal son: 'Although my house be not so with God [although my life be stained, and my righteousness unfit to be offered to His pure eyes]; yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire.'

THE WORD THAT SCATTERS FEAR

'Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.
GENESIS xv. 1.

I

Abram was now apparently about eighty-five years old. He had been fourteen years in Palestine, and had, for the only time in his life, quite recently been driven to have recourse to arms against a formidable league of northern kings, whom, after a swift forced march from the extreme south to the extreme north of the land, he had defeated. He might well fear attack from their overwhelmingly superior forces. So this vision, like all God's words, fits closely to moments needs, but is also for all time and all men.

1. The call to conquer fear.

Fear not.—(*a*) There is abundant reason for fear in facts of life. There are so many certain evils, and so many possible evils, that any man who is not a feather-brained fool must sometimes quail.

(*b*) Reasons for fear in our relations to divine law.

(*c*) The only rational way of conquering fears is by showing them to be unfounded. It is waste of breath to say, Don't be afraid, and to do nothing to remove the occasions of fear. It is childish to try to get rid of fears by shutting the eyes tight and refusing to look formidable facts in the face.

(*d*) The revelation of God is the true antidote to fear.

(*e*) 'Fear not' is the characteristic word of divine revelation. It is of frequent occurrence from Abraham till John in Patmos.

2. The ground of the call in the Revelation of God as Shield.

(*a*) As to outward evils, His protection assures us, not of absolute exemption, but of His entire control of them, so that men and circumstances are His instruments, and His will only is powerful. Chedorlaomer and all the allied kings are nothing; 'a noise,' as the prophet said of a later conqueror. All the bitterness and terror is taken out of evil. If any fiery dart pass through the shield, all its poison is wiped off in passage. So there remains no reason for fear, since all things work together for good. Behind that shield we are safe as diver in his bell, though seas rave and sea-monsters swim around.

(*b*) As to inward evils, our Shield assures us of absolute exemption. 'Shield of faith.' Faith is shield because it takes hold of God's strength.

3. The ground of the call in the Revelation of God as Reward. Abraham had refused all share in booty, a large sacrifice, and here he is promised, A Reward in God, *i.e.* He gives Himself in recompense for all sacrifices in path of duty. 'The Lord is able to give thee much more than these.' This promise opens out to general truth that God Himself is the true reward of a devout life. There are many recompenses for all sacrifices for God, some of them outward and material, some of them inward and spiritual, but the reward which surpasses all others is that by such sacrifices we attain to greater capacity for God, and therefore possess more of Him. This is the only Reward worth thinking of—God only satisfies the soul. With Him we are rich; without Him poor; 'exceeding great'—'riches in glory,' transcending all measure. The revelations of God as Shield and Reward are both given in reference to the present life, but the former applies only to earth, where 'without are fighters, within are fears'; while

the latter is mainly true for heaven, where those who have fought, having God for their Shield, will possess Him for their Reward, in a measure and manner which will make all earthly experiences seem poor. Here the 'heirs of God' get subsistence money, which is a small instalment of their inheritance; there they enter into possession of it all.

II

Many years have passed since Abram was called to go forth from his father's house, assured that God would make of him a great nation. They had been years of growing power. He has been dwelling at Mamre, as a prince among the people of the land, a power. There sweeps down on Southern Palestine the earliest of those invasions from the vast plains of the North which afterwards for generations were the standing dread of Abram's descendants. Like the storm pillars in their own deserts, are these wild marauders with the wild names that never appear again in the history. Down on the rich valleys and peaceful pasture lands they swoop for booty, not for conquest. Like some sea-bird, they snatch their prey and away. They carry with them among the long train of captives Abram's ungenerous brother-in-law, Lot. Then the friend of God, the father of the faithful, musters his men, like an Arab sheikh as he was, and swiftly follows the track of the marauders over the hills of Samaria, and across the plain of Jezreel. The night falls, and down he swoops upon them and scatters them. Coming back he had interviews with the King of Sodom, when he refuses to take any of the spoil, and with Melchizedek.

Abram is back at Mamre. How natural that fear and depression should seize him: the reaction from high excitement; the dread that from the swarming East vengeance would come for his success in that night surprise; the thought that if it did, he was a wandering stranger in a strange land and could not count on allies. Then there would come, perhaps, the remembrance of how long God had delayed the very beginnings of the fulfilment, 'Seeing I go childless.'

To this mood of mind the divine vision is addressed. 'Fear not—I am thy shield' whatever force comes against thee, 'and thine exceeding great reward,'—perhaps in reference to his refusal to take anything from the spoil. But God says this to us all. In these antique words the very loftiest and purest principles of spiritual religion are set forth.

He that loves and trusts God possesses God.

He that possesses God has enough for earth.

He that possesses God has enough for heaven.

1. It is possible for a man to have God for his. 'I am thy Reward,'—not merely Rewarder, but Reward.

How can one spiritual Being belong to another?—plainly, By mutual love.

The Gospel assures us of God's love, and makes it possible for ours to be fixed on Him.

Faith gives us God for ours.

The highest view of the blessings of the Gospel is that God Himself becomes our reward.

How sad the insanity of men appears, in the ordinary aims of their life, its rewards and its objects of desire! How they chase after variety!

How much loftier and truer a conception of the blessing of religion this is than notions of mere escape and the like!

2. The possession of God is enough for earth.

God the all-sufficient object for our spirits, His love, the communication of Himself, the sense of His presence, the depths of His infinite character, of His wondrous ways, of His revealed Truth as an object for thought: of His authoritative will as imperative for will and conscience: aspiration towards Him.

God the Eternal Object.

To find Him in everything, and everything in Him, is to be at rest.

This is what He promises—

Not a life of outward success and ease—much nobler than if He did.

Take Abram's as a type.

In war He will be our Defence.

In absence of other joys He will be Enough.

Sphered and included in Him is all sweetness. He sustains all relations, and does for us what these other joys and goods partially do.

The possession of His love should put away all fear, since having Him we are not at the mercy of externals.

What, then, is Life as men ordinarily make it?—what a blunder!

3. To possess God is enough for heaven.

Such a relationship is the great proof of immortality.

Christ and Sadducees.

The true glory of heaven is in fuller possession of God: no doubt other things, but these subsidiary.

The Reward is God.

The idea of recompense ample and full for all sorrow.

More than adequate wages for all work.

That final reward will show how wise the wanderer was, who left his father's house and 'looked for a city. God is not ashamed to be called their God.

Christ comes to us—offers Himself.

Think of how rich with Him, and oh, think of how poor without Him!

Which will you have on earth?

Which will you have in another world?

FAITH AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

And he believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness.'
GENESIS xv. 6.

IT is remarkable to find this anticipation of New Testament teaching so far back. It is like finding one full-blown flower in a garden where all else is but swelling into bud. No wonder that Paul fastened on it to prove that justification by faith was older than Moses, than law or circumcision, that his teaching was the real original, and that faith lay at the foundation of the Old Testament religion.

1. The Nature of Faith.—The metaphor in the Hebrew word is that of a man leaning all his weight on some strong stay. Surely that metaphor says more than many definitions. It teaches that the essence of faith is absolute reliance, and that unites us with Him on whom we rely. Its result will be steadfastness. We are weak, mobile, apt to be driven hither and thither, but light things lashed to fixed things become fixed. So 'reeds shaken with wind' are changed into iron pillars.

2. The Object of Faith.—'Lord.' It is a Person, not the promise but the Promiser. Of course, reliance on the Person results in acceptance of His word, and here

it is God's word as to the future. Our faith has to do with the future, but also with the past. Its object is Christ, the historic Christ, the living Christ, the Christ who will come again. How clear the nature of faith becomes when its object is clear! It cannot be mere assent, but trust. How clear becomes its identity in all ages! The creeds may be different in completeness, but the object of faith is the same, and the emotion is the same.

3. The effect of Faith.—Righteous is conformity to the will of God. Abram was not righteous, but he yielded himself to God and trusted Him, and God accepted that as the equivalent of righteousness. The acceptance was shown by the Covenant, and by the fulfilment of the promises.

So here is the great truth that faith is accepted for righteous. It is rightly regarded and treated as righteous, by the estimate of God, who estimates things as they really are. It *is* righteousness, for—

(*a*) Faith is itself a supreme act of righteousness, as being accordant with God's supreme desire for man.

(*b*) Faith unites with Christ the righteous.

(*c*) Faith will blossom out into all righteousness.

WAITING FAITH REWARDED AND STRENGTHENED BY NEW REVELATIONS

'And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect. And I will make My covenant between Me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying, As for Me, behold, My covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee. And I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God. And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep My covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations.'

GENESIS xvii. 1-9.

ABRAM was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. He was ninety-nine when God appeared to him, as recorded in this chapter. There had been three divine communications in these twenty-five years—one at Bethel on entering the land, one after the hiving off of Lot, and one after the battle with the Eastern kings. The last-named vision had taken place before Ishmael's birth, and therefore more than thirteen years prior to the date of the lesson.

We are apt to think of Abraham's life as being crowded with supernatural revelations. We forget the foreshortening necessary in so brief a sketch of so long a career, which brings distant points close together. Revelations were really but thinly sown in Abram's life. For something over thirteen years he had been left to walk by faith, and, no doubt, had felt the pressure of things seen, silently pushing the unseen out of his life.

Especially would this be the case as Ishmael grew up, and his father's heart began to cling to him. The promise was beginning to grow dimmer, as years passed without the birth of the promised heir. As verse 18 of this chapter shows, Abram's thoughts were turning to Ishmael as a possible substitute. His wavering confidence was steadied and quickened by this new revelation. We, too, are often tempted to think that, in the highest matters, 'a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,' and to wish that God would be content with our Ishmaels, which satisfy us, and would not withdraw us from possessed good, to make us live by hope of good unseen. We need to reflect on this vision when we are thus tempted.

1. Note the revelation of God's character, and of our consequent duty, which preceded the repetition of the covenant. 'I am the Almighty God.' The aspect of the divine nature, made prominent in each revelation of Himself, stands in close connection with the circumstances or mental state of the recipient. So when God appeared to Abram after the slaughter of the kings, He revealed Himself as 'thy Shield,' with reference to the danger of renewed attack from the formidable powers which He had bearded and beaten. In the present case the stress is laid on God's omnipotence, which points to doubts whispering in Abram's heart, by reason of God's delay in fulfilling His word, and of his own advancing years and failing strength. Paul brings out the meaning of the revelation when he glorifies the faith which it kindled anew in Abram, 'being fully assured that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform' (Rom. iv. 21). Whenever our 'faith has fallen asleep,' and we are ready to let go our hold of God's ideal and settle down on the low levels of the actual, or to be somewhat ashamed of our aspirations after what seems so slow of realisation, or to elevate prudent calculations of probability above the daring enthusiasms of Christian hope, the ancient word, that breathed itself into Abram's hushed heart, should speak new vigour into ours. 'I am the Almighty God—take My power into all thy calculations, and reckon certainties with it for the chief factor. The one impossibility is that any word of Mine should fail. The one imprudence is to doubt My word.'

What follows in regard to our duty from that revelation? 'Walk before Me, and be thou perfect.' Enoch walked *with* God; that is, his whole active life was passed in communion with Him. The idea conveyed by 'walking *before* God' is not precisely the same. It is rather that of an active life, spent in continual consciousness of being 'naked and opened before the eyes of Him to whom we have to give account.' That thrilling consciousness will not paralyse nor terrify, if we feel that we are not only 'ever in the great Task-Master's eye,' but that God's omniscience is all-knowing love, and is brought closer to our hearts and clothed in gracious tenderness in Christ whose 'eyes were as a flame of fire,' but whose love is more ardent still, who knows us altogether, and pities and loves as perfectly as He knows.

What sort of life will spring from the double realisation of God's almightiness, and of our being ever before Him? 'Be thou perfect.' Nothing short of immaculate conformity with His will can satisfy His gaze. His desire for us should be our aim and desire for ourselves. The standard of aspiration and effort cannot be lowered to meet weakness. This is nobility of life—to aim at the unattainable, and to be ever approximating towards our aim. It is more blessed to be smitten with the longing to win the unwon than to stagnate in ignoble contentment with partial attainments. Better to climb, with faces turned upwards to the inaccessible peak, than to lie at ease in the fat valleys! It is the salt of life to have our aims set fixedly towards ideal perfection, and to say, 'I count not myself to have apprehended: but . . . I press toward the mark.' *Toward* that mark is better than *to* any lower. Our moral perfection is, as it were, the reflection in humanity of the divine almightiness

The wide landscape may be mirrored in an inch of glass. Infinity may be, in some manner, presented in miniature in finite natures. Our power cannot represent God's omnipotence, but our moral perfection may, especially since that omnipotence is pledged to make us perfect if we will walk before Him.

2. Note the sign of the renewed covenant. Compliance with these injunctions is clearly laid down as the human condition of the divine fulfilment of it. 'Be thou perfect' comes first; 'My covenant is with thee' follows. There was contingency recognised from the beginning. If Israel broke the covenant, God was not unfaithful if He should not adhere to it. But the present point is that a new confirmation is given before the terms are repeated. The main purpose, then, of this revelation, did not lie in that repetition, but in the seal given to Abram by the change of name.

Another sign was also given, which had a wider reference. The change of name was God's seal to His part. Circumcision was the seal of the other party, by which Abram, his family, and afterwards the nation, took on themselves the obligations of the compact.

The name bestowed is taken to mean 'Father of a Multitude.' It was the condensation into a word, of the divine promise. What a trial of Abram's faith it was to bid him take a name which would sound in men's ears liker irony than promise! He, close on a hundred years old, with but one child, who was known not to be the heir, to be called the father of many! How often Canaanites and his own household would smile as they used it! What a piece of senile presumption it would seem to them! How often

Abram himself would be tempted to think his new name a farce rather than a sign! But he took it humbly from God, and he wore it, whether it brought ridicule from others or assurance in his own heart. It takes some courage for any of us to call ourselves by names which rest on God's promise and seem to have little vindication in present facts. The world is fond of laughing at 'saints,' but Christians should familiarise themselves with the lofty designations which God gives His children, and see in them not only a summons to life corresponding, but a pledge and prophecy of the final possession of all which these imply. God calls 'things that are not, as though they were'; and it is wisdom, faith, and humility—not presumption—which accepts the names as omens of what shall one day be.

The substance of the covenant is mainly identical with previous revelations. The land is to belong to Abram's seed. That seed is to be very numerous. But there is new emphasis placed on God's relation to Abram's descendants. God promises to be 'a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee,' and, again, 'I will be their God' (verses 7, 8). That article of the old covenant is repeated in the new (Jer. xxxi. 33), with the addition, 'And they shall be My people,' which is really involved in it. We do not read later more spiritual ideas into the words, when we find in them here, at the very beginning of Hebrew monotheism, an insight into the deep truth of the reciprocal possession of God by us, and of us by God. What a glimpse into the depths of that divine heart is given, when we see that we are His possession, precious to Him above all the riches of earth and the magnificences of heaven! What a lesson as to the inmost blessedness of religion, when we learn that it takes God for its very own, and is rich in possessing Him, whatever else may be owned or lacking!

To possess God is only possible on condition of yielding ourselves to Him. When we give ourselves up, in heart, mind, and will, to be His, He is ours. When we cease to be our own, we get God for ours. The self-centred man is poor; he neither owns himself nor anything besides, in any deep sense. When we lose ourselves in God, we find ourselves, and being content to have nothing, and not even to be our own masters or owners, we possess ourselves more truly than ever, and have God for our portion, and in Him 'all things are ours.'

A PETULANT WISH

'And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before Thee!'
GENESIS xvii. 18.

THESE words sound very devout, and they have often been used by Christian parents yearning for the best interests of their children, and sometimes of their wayward and prodigal children. But consecrated as they are by that usage, I am afraid that their meaning, as they were uttered, was nothing so devout and good as that which is often attached to them.

1. Note the temper in which Abraham speaks here. The very existence of Ishmael was a memorial of Abraham's failure in faith and patience. For he thought that the promised heir was long in coming, and so he thought that he would help God. For thirteen years the child had been living beside him, winding a son's way into a father's heart, with much

in his character, as was afterwards seen, that would make a frank, daring boy his old father's darling. Then all at once comes the divine message, 'This is not the son of the Covenant; this is not the heir of the Promise. Sarah shall have a child, and from him shall come the blessings that have been foretold.' And what does Abraham do? Fall down in thankfulness before God? leap up in heart at the conviction that now at last the long-looked-for fulfilment of the oath of God was impending? Not he. 'O that *Ishmael* might live before Thee. Why cannot *he* do? Why may he not be the chosen child, the heir of the Promise? Take him, O God!'

That is to say, he thinks he knows better than God. He is petulant, he resists his blessing, he fancies that his own plan is quite as good as the divine plan. He does not want to draw away his heart from the child that it has twined round. So he loses the blessing of the revelation that is being made to him; because he does not bow his will, and accept God's way instead of his own. Now, do you not think that that is what we do? When God sends us Isaac, do we not often say, 'Take Ishmael; he is my own making. I have set all my hopes on him. Why should I have to wrench them all away?' In our individual lives we want to prescribe to God, far too often, not only the *ends*, but the *way* in which we shall get to the ends; and we think to ourselves, 'That road of my own engineering that I have got all staked out, that is the true way for God's providence to take.' And when His path does not coincide with ours, then we are discontented, and instead of submitting we go with our pet schemes to Him; and if not in so many words, at least in spirit and temper, we try to force our way upon God, and when He is speaking about Isaac insist on pressing Ishmael on His notice.

It is often so in regard to our individual lives; and it is so in regard to the united action of Christian people very often. A great deal of what calls itself earnest contending for 'the faith once delivered to the saints' is nothing more nor less than insisting that methods of men's devising shall be continued, when God seems to be substituting for them methods of His own sending; and so fighting about externals and church polity and determining that the world has got to be saved in my own special fashion, and in no other, though God Himself seems to be suggesting the new thing to me. That is a very frequent phenomenon in the experience of Christian communities and churches. Ishmael is so very dear. He is not the child of promise, but he is the child that we have thought it advisable to help God with. It is hard for us to part with him.

Dear brethren, sometimes, too, God comes to us in various providences, and not only reduces into chaos and a heap of confusion our nicely built-up little houses, but He sometimes comes to us, and lifts us out of some lower kind of good, which is perfectly satisfactory to us, or all but perfectly satisfactory, in order to give to us something nobler and higher. And we resist that too; and do not see why Ishmael should not serve God's turn as he has served ours; or think that there is no need at all for Isaac to come into our lives. God never takes away from us a lower, unless for the purpose of bestowing upon us a higher blessing. Therefore not to submit is the foolishest thing that men can do.

But if that be anything like an account of the temper expressed by this saying, is it not strange that murmuring against God takes the shape of praying? Ah! there is a great deal of 'prayer,' as it calls itself, which is just moulded upon this petulant word of Abraham's momentarily failing faith and submission. How many people think that to pray means to bring their wishes to God, and try to coax Him to make them His wishes! Why, half the shallow sceptical talk of this generation about the worthlessness of prayer goes upon that fundamental fallacy that the notion of prayer is to dictate terms to God; and that unless a man gets his wishes answered he has no right to suppose that his prayers are answered. But it is not so. Prayer is not after the type of 'O that Ishmael might live before Thee!' That is a poor kind of prayer of which the inmost spirit is resistance to a clear dictate of the divine will, but the true prayer is, 'O that I may be willing to take what Thou art willing, in Thy mercy and love, to send!'

I believe in importunate prayer, but I believe also that a great deal of what calls itself importunate prayer is nothing more than an obstinate determination not to be satisfied with what satisfies God. If a man has been bringing his wishes—and he cannot but have such—continuously to God, with regard to any outward things, and these have not been answered, he needs to look very carefully into his own temper and heart in order to make sure that what seems to be waiting upon God in importunate petition is not pestering Him with refused desires. To make a prayer out of my rebellion against His will is surely the greatest abuse of prayer that can be conceived. And when Abraham said, 'O that Ishmael might live before Thee!' if he said it in the spirit in which I think he did, he was not praying, but he was grumbling.

2. And then notice, still further, how such a temper and such a prayer have the effect of hiding joy and blessing from us.

This was the crisis of Abraham's whole life. It was the moment at which his hundred years nearly of patient waiting were about to be rewarded. The message which he had just received was the most lovely and gracious word that ever had come to him from the heavens, although many such words had come. And what does he do with it? Instead of falling down before God, and letting his whole heart go out in jubilant gratitude, he has nothing to say but 'I would rather that Thou didst it in another way. It is all very well to speak about sending this heir of promise. I have no pleasure in that, because it means that my Ishmael is to be passed by and shelved.' So the proffered joy is turned to ashes, and Abraham gets no good, for the moment, out of God's greatest blessing to him; but all the sky is darkened by mists that come up from his own heart.

Brethren, if you want to be miserable, perk up your own will against God's. If you want to be blessed, acquiesce in all that He does send, in all that He has sent, and, by anticipation, in all that He will send. For, depend upon it, the secret of finding sunbeams in everything is simply letting God have His own way, and making your will the sounding-board and echo of His. If Abraham had done as he ought to have done, that would have been the gladdest moment of his life. You and I can make out of our deepest sorrows the occasions of pure, though it is quiet, gladness, if only we have learned to say, 'Not my will, but Thy will be done.' That is the talisman that turns everything into gold, and makes sorrow forget its nature, and almost approximate to solemn joy.

3. My last word is this: God loves us all too well to listen to such a prayer.

Abraham's passionate cry was so much empty wind, and was like a straw laid across the course of an express train, in so far as its power to modify the gracious purpose of God already declared was concerned. And would it not be a miserable thing if we could deflect the solemn, loving march of the divine Providence by these hot, foolish, purblind wishes of ours, that see only the nearer end of things, and have no notion of where their further end may go, or what it may be?

Is it not better that we should fall back upon this thought, though, at first sight, it seems so to limit the power of petition, 'We know that if we ask anything according to His will He heareth us'? There is nothing that would more wreck our lives than if what some people want were to be the case—that God should let us have our own way, and give us serpents because we asked for them and fancied they were eggs; or let us break our teeth upon bestowed stones because, like whimpering children crying for the moon, we had asked for them under the delusion that they were bread.

Leave all that in His hands; and be sure of this, that the true way to peace, to rest, to gladness, and to wringing the last drop of possible sweetness out of gifts and losses, disappointments and fruitions, is to have no will but God's will enthroned above and in our own wills. If Abraham had acquiesced and submitted, Ishmael and Isaac would have been a pai to bless his life, as they stood together over his grave. And if you and I will leave God to order all our ways, and not try to interfere with His purposes by our short-sighted dictation, 'all things will work together for good to us, because we love God,' and lovingly accept His will and His law.

'BECAUSE OF HIS IMPORTUNITY'

'And the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way. And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him. And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto Me; and if not, I will know. And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the Lord. And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt Thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt Thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that are therein? That be far from Thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from Thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? And the Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes. And Abraham answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes: Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt Thou destroy all the city for lack of five? And He said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy it. And he spake unto Him yet again, and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there. And He said, I will not do it for forty's sake. And he said unto Him, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Peradventure there shall thirty be found there. And He said, I will not do it, if I find thirty there. And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord: Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And He said, I will not destroy it for twenty's sake. And he said, Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And He said, I will not destroy it for ten's sake. And the Lord went His way, as soon as He had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place.'—GENESIS xviii. 16-33.

I

THE first verse of this chapter says that 'the Lord appeared' unto Abraham, and then proceeds to tell that 'three men stood over against him,' thus indicating that these were, collectively, the manifestation of Jehovah. Two of the three subsequently 'went toward Sodom,' and are called 'angels' in chapter xix. 1. One remained with Abraham, and is addressed by him as 'Lord,' but the three are similarly addressed in verse 3. The inference is that Jehovah appeared, not only in the one 'man' who spake with Abraham, but also in the two who went to Sodom.

In this incident we have, first, God's communication of His purpose to Abraham. He was called the friend of God, and friends confide in each other. 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him,' and it is ever true that they who live in amity and communion with God thereby acquire insight into His purposes. Even in regard to public or so-called 'political' events, a man who believes in God and His moral government will often be endowed with a 'terrible sagacity,' which forecasts consequences more surely than do godless politicians. In regard to one's own history, it is still more evidently true that the one way to apprehend God's purposes in it is to keep in close friendship with Him. Then we shall see the meaning of the else bewildering whirl of events, and be able to say, 'He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God.' But the reason assigned for intrusting Abraham with the knowledge of God's purpose is to be noted. It was because of his place as the medium of blessing to the nations, and as the lawgiver to his descendants. God had 'known him,'—that is, had lovingly brought him into close relations with Himself, not for his own sake only, but, much more, that he might be a channel of grace to Israel and the world. His 'commandment' to his descendants was to lead to their worship of Jehovah and their upright living, and these again to their possession of the blessings promised to Abraham. That purpose would be aided by the knowledge of the judgment on Sodom, its source, and its cause, and therefore Abraham was admitted into the council-chamber of Jehovah. The insight given to God's friends is given that they may more fully benefit men by leading them into paths of righteousness, on which alone they can be met by God's blessings.

The strongly figurative representation in verses 20, 21, according to which Jehovah goes down to ascertain whether the facts of Sodom's sin correspond to the report of it, belongs to the early stage of revelation, and need not surprise us, but should impress on us the gradual character of the divine Revelation, which would have been useless unless it had been accommodated to the mental and spiritual stature of its recipients. Nor should it hide from us the lofty conception of God's long-suffering justice, which is presented in so childlike a form. He does 'not judge after . . . the hearing of His ears,' nor smite without full knowledge of the sin. A later stage of revelation puts the same thought in language less strange to us, when it teaches that 'the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed,' and in His balances many a false estimate, both of virtuous and vicious acts, is corrected, and retribution is always exactly adjusted to the deed.

But the main importance of the incident is in the wonderful picture of Abraham's intercession, which, in like manner, veils, under a strangely sensuous representation, lofty truths for all ages. It is to be noted that the divine purpose expressed in 'I will go down now, and see,' is fulfilled in the going of the two (men or angels) towards Sodom; therefore

Jehovah was in them. But He was also in the One before whom Abraham stood. The first great truth enshrined in this part of the story is that the friend of God is compassionate even of the sinful and degraded Abraham did not intercede for Lot, but for the sinners in Sodom. He had perilled his life in warfare for them; he now pleads with God for them. Where had he learned this brave pity? Where but from the God with whom he lived by faith? How much more surely will real communion with Jesus lead *us* to look on all men, and especially on the vicious and outcast, with His eyes who saw the multitudes as sheep without a shepherd, torn, panting, scattered, and lying exhausted and defenceless! Indifference to the miseries and impending dangers of Christless men is impossible for any whom He calls 'not servants, but friends.'

Again, we are taught the boldness of pleading which is permitted to the friend of God, and is compatible with deepest reverence. Abraham is keenly conscious of his audacity, and yet, though he knows himself to be but dust and ashes, that does not stifle his petitions. His was the holy 'importunity' which Jesus sent forth for our imitation. The word so rendered in Luke xi. 8, which is found in the New Testament there only, literally means 'shamelessness,' and is exactly the disposition which Abraham showed here. Not only was he persistent, but he increased his expectations with each partial granting of his prayer. The more God gives, the more does the true suppliant expect and crave; and rightly so, for the gift to be given is infinite, and each degree of possession enlarges capacity so as to fit to receive more, and widens desire. What contented us to-day should not content us to-morrow.

Again, Abraham is bold in appealing to a law to which God is bound to conform. 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' is often quoted with an application foreign to its true meaning. Abraham was not preaching to men trust that the most perplexing acts of God would be capable of full vindication if we knew all, but he was pleading with God that His acts should be plainly accordant with the idea of justice planted by Him in us. The phrase is often used to strengthen the struggling faith that

'All is right which seems most wrong,
If it be His sweet will.'

But it means not 'Such and such a thing must be right because God has done it,' but 'Such and such a thing is right, therefore God must do it.' Of course, our conceptions of right are not the absolute measure of the divine acts, and the very fact which Abraham thought contrary to justice is continually exemplified in Providence, that 'the righteous should be as the wicked' in regard to earthly calamities affecting communities. So far Abraham was wrong, but the spirit of his remonstrance was wholly right.

Again, we learn the precious lesson that prayer for others is a real power, and does bring down blessings and avert evils. Abraham did not here pray for Lot, but yet 'God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow' (chap. xix. 29), so that there had been unrecorded intercession for him too. The unselfish desires for others, that exhale from human hearts under the influence of the love which Christ plants in us, do come down in blessings on others, as the moisture drawn up by the sun may descend in fructifying rain on far-off pastures of the wilderness. We help one another when we pray for one another.

The last lesson taught is that 'righteous' men are indeed the 'salt of the earth,' not only preserving cities and nations from further corruption, but procuring for them further existence and probation. God holds back His judgments so long as hope of amendment survives, and 'will not destroy for the ten's sake.'

THE INTERCOURSE OF GOD AND HIS FRIEND

II

We have seen that the fruit of Abraham's faith was God's entrance into close covenant relations with him; or, as James puts it, 'It was reckoned unto him for righteousness; and he was called the friend of God.' This incident shows us the intercourse of the divine and human friends in its familiarity, mutual confidence, and power. It is a forecast of Christ's own profound teachings in His parting words in the upper chamber, concerning the sweet and wondrous intercourse between the believing soul and the indwelling God.

1. The friend of God catches a gleam of divine pity and tenderness. Abraham has no relations with the men of Sodom. Their evil ways would repel him; and he would be a stranger among them still more than among the Canaanites, whose iniquity was 'not yet full.' But though he has no special bonds with them, he cannot but melt with tender compassion when he hears their doom. Communion with the very Source of all gentle love has softened his heart, and he yearns

over the wicked and fated city. Where else than from his heavenly Friend could he have learned this sympathy? It wells up in this chapter like some sudden spring among solemn solitudes—the first instance of that divine charity which is the best sign that we have been with God, and have learned of Him. All that the New Testament teaches of love to God, as necessarily issuing in love to man, and of the true love to man as overleaping all narrow bounds of kindred, country, race, and ignoring all questions of character, and gushing forth in fullest energy towards the sinners in danger of just punishment, is here in germ. The friend of God must be the friend of men; and if they be wicked, and he sees the frightful doom which they do not see, these make his pity the deeper. Abraham does not contest the justice of the doom. He lives too near his friend not to know that sin must mean death. The effect of friendship with God is not to make men wish that there were no judgments for evil-doers, but to touch their hearts with pity, and to stir them to intercession and to effort for their deliverance.

2. The friend of God has absolute trust in the rectitude of His acts. Abraham's remonstrance, if we may call it so, embodies some thoughts about the government of God in the world which should be pondered.

His first abrupt question, flung out without any reverential preface, assumes that the character of God requires that the fate of the righteous should be distinguished from that of the wicked. The very brusqueness of the question shows that he supposed himself to be appealing to an elementary and indubitable law of God's dealings. The teachings of the Fall and of the Flood had graven deep on his conscience the truth that the same loving Friend must needs deal out rewards to the good and chastisement to the bad. That was the simple faith of an early time, when problems like those which tortured the writers of the seventy-third Psalm, or of Job and Ecclesiastes, had not yet disturbed the childlike trust of the friend of God, because no facts in his experience had forced them on him. But the belief which was axiomatic to him, and true for his supernaturally shaped life with its special miracles and visible divine guard, is not the ultimate and irrefragable principle which he thought it. In widespread calamities the righteous are blended with the wicked in one bloody ruin; and it is the very misery of such judgments that often the sufferers are not the wrongdoers, but that the fathers eat the sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge. The whirlwind of temporal judgments makes no distinctions between the dwellings of the righteous and the wicked, but levels them both. No doubt, the fact that the impending destruction was to be a direct Divine interposition of a punitive kind made it more necessary that it should be confined to the actual culprits. No doubt, too, Abraham's zeal for the honour of God's government was right. But his first plea belongs to the stage of revelation at which he stood, not to that of the New Testament, which teaches that the eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell were not sinners above all men in Jerusalem. Abraham's confidence in God's justice, not Abraham's conceptions of what that justice required, is to be imitated. A friend of God will hold fast by the faith that 'His way is perfect,' and will cherish it even in the presence of facts more perplexing than any which met Abraham's eyes.

Another assumption in his prayer is that the righteous are sources of blessing and shields for the wicked. Has he there laid hold of a true principle? Certainly, it is indeed the law that 'every man shall bear his own burden,' but that law is modified by the operation of this other, of which God's providence is full. Many a drop of blessing trickles from the wet fleece to the dry ground. Many a stroke of judgment is carried off harmlessly by the lightning conductor. Where God's friends are inextricably mixed up with evil-doers, it is not rare to see diffused blessings which are destined indeed primarily for the former, but find their way to the latter. Christians are the 'salt of the earth' in this sense too, that they save corrupt communities from swift destruction, and for their sakes the angels delay their blow. In the final resort, each soul must reap its own harvest from its own deeds; but the individualism of Christianity is not isolation. We are bound together in mysterious community, and a good man is a fountain of far-flowing good. The truest 'saviours of society' are the servants of God.

A third principle is embodied in the solemn question, 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' This is not meant in its bearing here, as we so often hear it quoted, to silence man's questionings as to mysterious divine acts, or to warn us from applying our measures of right and wrong to these. The very opposite thought is conveyed; namely, the confidence that what God does must approve itself as just to men. He is Judge of all the earth, and therefore bound by His very nature, as by His relations to men, to do nothing that cannot be pointed to as inflexibly right. If Abraham had meant, 'What God does, must needs be right, therefore crush down all questions of how it accords with thy sense of justice,' he would have been condemning his own prayer as presumptuous, and the thought would have been entirely out of place. But the appeal to God to vindicate His own character by doing what shall be in manifest accord with His name, is bold language indeed, but not too bold, because it is prompted by absolute confidence in Him. God's punishments must be obviously righteous to have moral effect, or to be worthy of Him.

But true as the principle is, it needs to be guarded. Abraham himself is an instance that men's conceptions of right do not completely correspond to the reality. His notion of 'right' was, in some particulars, as his life shows, imperfect, rudimentary, and far beneath New Testament ideas. Conscience needs education. The best men's conceptions of what befits divine justice are relative, progressive; and a shifting standard is no standard. It becomes us to be very cautious before we say to God, 'This is the way. Walk Thou in it,' or dismiss any doctrine as untrue on the ground of its contradicting our instincts of justice.

3. The friend of God has power with God. 'Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?' The divine Friend recognises the obligation of confidence. True friendship is frank, and cannot bear to hide its purposes. That one sentence in its bold attribution of a like feeling to God leads us deep into the Divine heart, and the sweet reality of his amity. Insight into His will ever belongs to those who live near Him. It is the beginning of the long series of disclosures of 'the secret of the Lord' to 'them that fear Him,' which is crowned by 'henceforth I call you not servants; but . . . friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you.' So much for the divine side of the communion.

On the human side, we are here taught the great truth, that God's friends are intercessors, whose voice has a mysterious but most real power with God. If it be true, that, in general terms, the righteous are shields and sources of blessing to the unholy, it is still more distinctly true that they have access to God's secret place with petitions for others as well as for themselves. The desires which go up to God, like the vapours exhaled to heaven, fall in refreshing rain on spots far away from that whence they rose. In these days we need to keep fast hold of our belief in the efficacy of prayer for others and for ourselves. God knows Himself and the laws of His government a great deal better than any one besides does; and He has abundantly shown us in His Word, and by many experiences, that breath spent in intercession is not wasted. In these old times, when worship was mainly sacrificial, this wonderful instance of pure intercession meets us, an anticipation of later times. And from thence onwards there has never failed proof to those who will look for it, that God's friends are true priests, and help their brethren by their prayers. Our voices should 'rise like a fountain night and day' for men. But there is a secret distrust of the power, and a flagrantly plain neglect of the duty, of intercession nowadays, which need sorely the lesson that God 'remembered Abraham' and delivered Lot. Luther, in his rough, strong way, says: 'If I have a Christian who prays to God for me, I will be of good courage, and be afraid of nothing. If I have one who prays against me, I had rather have the Grand Turk for my enemy.'

The tone of Abraham's intercession may teach us how familiar the intercourse with the Heavenly Friend may be. The boldest words from a loving heart, jealous of God's honour, are not irreverent in His eyes. This prayer is abrupt, almost rough. It sounds like remonstrance quite as much as prayer. Abraham appeals to God to take care of His name and honour, as if he had said, If Thou doest this, what will the world say of Thee, but that Thou art unmerciful? But the grand confidence in God's character, the eager desire that it should be vindicated before the world, the dread that the least film should veil the silvery whiteness or the golden lustre of His name, the sensitiveness for His honour—these are the effects of communion with Him; and for these God accepts the bold prayer as truer reverence than is found in many more guarded and lowly sounding words. Many conventional proprieties of worship may be broken just because the worship is real. 'The frequent sputter shows that the soul's depths boil in earnest.' We may learn, too, that the most loving familiarity never forgets the fathomless gulf between God and it. Abraham remembers that he is 'dust and ashes'; he knows that he is venturing much in speaking to God. His pertinacious prayers have a recurring burden of lowly recognition of his place. Twice he heralds them with 'I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord'; twice with 'Oh let not the Lord be angry.' Perfect love casts out fear and deepens reverence. We may come with free hearts, from which every weight of trembling and every cloud of doubt has been lifted. But the less the dread, the lower we shall bow before the Loftiness which we love. We do not pray aright until we tell God everything. The 'boldness' which we as Christians ought to have, means literally a frank speaking out of all that is in our hearts. Such 'boldness and access with confidence' will often make short work of so-called seemly reverence, but it will never transgress by so much as a hair's-breadth the limits of lowly, trustful love.

Abraham's persistency may teach us a lesson. If one might so say, he hangs on God's skirt like a burr. Each petition granted only encourages him to another. Six times he pleads, and God waits till he has done before He goes away; He cannot leave His friend till that friend has said all his say. What a contrast the fiery fervour and unwearying pertinacity of Abraham's prayers make to the stiff formalism of the intercessions one is familiar with! The former are like the successive pulses of a volcano driving a hot lava stream before it; the latter, like the slow flow of a glacier, cold and sluggish. Is any part of our public or private worship more hopelessly formal than our prayers for others? This picture from the old world may well shame our languid petitions, and stir us up to a holy boldness and persistence in prayer. Our Saviour Himself teaches that 'men ought always to pray, and not to faint,' and Himself recommends to us a holy importunity, which He teaches us to believe is, in mysterious fashion, a power with God. He gives room for such patient continuance in prayer by sometimes delaying the apparent answer, not because He needs to be won over to bless, but because it is good for us to draw near, and to keep near, the Lord. He is ever at the door, ready to open, and if sometimes, like Rhoda to Peter, He does not open immediately, and we have to keep knocking, it is that our desires may increase by delay, and so He may be able to give a blessing, which will be the greater and sweeter for the tarrying.

So the friendship is manifested on both sides: on God's, by disclosure of His purpose and compliance with His friend's request; on Abraham's, by speech which is saved from irreverence by love, and by prayer which is acceptable to God by its very importunity. Jesus Christ has promised us the highest form of such friendship, when He has said, 'I have called you friends: for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you'; and again, 'If ye abide in Me, . . . ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.'

THE SWIFT DESTROYER

'And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city. And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city. And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that He said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed. And Lot said unto them, Oh, not so, my Lord: Behold now, Thy servant hath found grace in Thy sight, and Thou hast magnified Thy mercy, which Thou hast shewed unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die: Behold now, this city is near to flee unto, and it is a little one: Oh, let me escape thither, (is it not a little one?) and my soul shall live. And He said unto him, See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken. Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither. Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar. The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar. Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; And He overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground. But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.'—GENESIS xix. 15-26.

THE religious significance of this solemn page of revelation is but little affected by any of the interesting questions which criticism raises concerning it, so that I am free to look at the whole narrative for the purpose of deducing its perennial lessons.

There are four clearly marked stages in the story: the lingering of Lot in the doomed city, and the friendly force which dragged him from it; the prayer of abject fear, and the wonderful answer; the awful catastrophe; and the fate of the wretched woman who looked back.

1. Lot's lingering and rescue by force. Second thoughts are not always best. When great resolves have to be made, and when a clear divine command has to be obeyed, the first thought is usually the nobler; and the second, which pulls it back, and damps its ardour, is usually of the earth, earthy. So was it with Lot. Overnight, in the excitement of the terrible scene enacted before his door, Lot had been not only resolved himself to flee, but his voice had urged his sons-in-law to escape from the doom which he then felt to be imminent. But with the cold grey light of morning his mood has changed. The ties which held him in Sodom reassert their power. Perhaps daylight made his fears seem less real. There was no sign in the chill Eastern twilight that this day was to be unlike the other days. Perhaps the angels' summons roused him from sleep, and their 'arise' is literally meant. It might have given wings to his flight. Urgent, and resonant, like the morning bugle, it bids him be stirring lest he be swept away 'in the punishment of the city.' Observe that the same word means 'sin' and 'punishment,'—a testimony to the profound truth that at bottom they are one, sin being pain in the root, pain being sin in the flower. So our own word 'evil' covers all the ground, and means both sin and sorrow. But even that pealing note does not shatter his hesitation. He still lingers. What kept him? That which had first taken him there—

material advantages. He had struck root in Sodom. The tent life which he had kept to at first has been long given up; we find him sitting in the gate of the city, the place for gossip and friendly intercourse. He has either formed, or is going to form, marriage alliances for his daughters with men of the city who are as black as the rest. Perhaps his wife, whom the story will not name, for pity or for horror, was a Sodomite. To escape meant to leave all this and his wealth behind. If he goes out, he goes out a pauper. So his heart, which is where his treasure is, makes his movements slow. What insanity his lingering must have seemed to the angels! I wonder if we, who cling so desperately to the world, and who are so slow to go where God would have us to be for our own safety, if thereby we shall lose anything of this world's wealth, seem very much wiser to eyes made clear-sighted with the wisdom of heaven. This poor hesitating lingerer, too much at home in the city of destruction to get out of it even to save his life, has plenty of brothers to-day. Every man who lets the world hold him by the skirts when Christ is calling him to salvation, and every man who is reluctant to obey any clear call to sacrifice and separation from godless men, may see his own face in this glass, and perhaps get a glimpse of its ugliness.

What a homely picture, full of weighty truth, the story gives us, of the angels each taking two of the reluctant four by the hand, and dragging them with some degree of kindly force from destruction into safety! So, in a great fire, domestic animals and horses seem to find a strange fascination in the flames, and have to be carried out of certain death by main force. They 'set him'—or we might read, 'made him rest'—outside the city. It was but a little distance, for these 'cities' were tiny places, and the walls were soon reached. But it was far enough to change Lot's whole feelings. He passes to feeble despair and abject fear, as we shall see. That forlorn group, homeless, friendless, stripped of everything, shivering outside the gate in the cold morning air, may teach us how wise and prudent the man is who seeks the kingdom of God second, and the other things first.

2. There was a pause outside the city. A new voice speaks now to Lot. 'They' brought him forth; but 'He' said 'escape.' The same 'Lord' to whom Abraham had prayed, has now rejoined the mysterious pair whom He had sent to Sodom. And Lot's entreaty is addressed to Him whom he calls 'my Lord.' He uses singular pronouns throughout, although the narrator says that he 'said unto *them*.' There seems to be here the same idea as is embodied in the word 'Elohim'; namely, that the divine powers are regarded as in some sense separable, and yet all inhering in a personal unity. At all events, we have here a distinct representation of an intercourse between God and man, in which thoughts are conveyed to the human spirit direct from the divine, and desires pass from the human to the divine. The manner of the intercourse we do not know, but the possibility of the fact can scarcely be denied by any believer in a God; and, however we may call this miraculous or abnormal, the essence of the event can be repeated in the experience of each of us. God still speaks to men, and men may still plead with God. Unless our religion is communion, it is nothing.

The divine voice reiterates the angels' urgent command in still more stringent words: 'Escape for thy life.' There is to be no more angel-leading, but Lot's feet are to be made as hinds' feet by the thought of the flaming death that is pursuing. His lingering looks are sternly forbidden, since they would delay his flight and divide his heart. The direction of his flight is for the first time pointed out. The fertile plain, which had lured him down from the safe hills, is prohibited. Only on the mountain-side, probably the eastern mountains, where the morning red was beginning to blush, is there safety.

Lot's answer shows a complete change of feeling. He is too fully alarmed now. His fright is so desperate that it has killed faith and common sense. The natural conclusion from God's mercy, which he acknowledges, would have been trust and obedience. 'Therefore I can escape,' not 'but I cannot escape,' would have been the logic of faith. The latter is the irrationality of fear. When a man who has been cleaving to this fleeting life of earthly good wakes up to believe his danger, he is ever apt to plunge into an abyss of terror, in which God's commands seem impossible, and His will to save becomes dim. The world first lies to us by 'You are quite safe where you are. Don't be in a hurry to go.' Then it lies, 'You never can get away now.' Reverse Lot's whimpering fears, and we get the truth. Are not God's directions how to escape, promises that we shall escape? Will He begin to build, and not be able to finish? Will the judgments of His hand overrun their commission, like a bloodhound which, in its master's absence, may rend his friend? 'We have all of us one human heart,' and this swift leap from unreasoning carelessness to as unreasoning dread, this failure to draw the true conclusion from God's past mercy, and this despairing recoil from the path pointed for us, and craving for easier ways, belongs to us. 'A strange servant of God was this,' say we. Yes, and we are often quite as strange. How many people awakened to see their danger are so absorbed by the sight that they cannot see the cross, or think they can never reach it!

God answered the cry, whatever its fault, and that may well make us pause in our condemnation. He hears even a very imperfect petition, and can see the tiniest germ of faith buried under thick clods of doubt and fear. This stooping readiness to meet Lot's weakness comes in wonderful contrast with the terrible revelation of judgment which follows. What a conception of God, which had room for this more than human patience with weakness, and also for the flashing, lurid glories of destructive retribution! Zoar is spared, not for the unworthy reason which Lot suggested—because its minuteness might buy impunity, as some noxious insect too small to be worth crushing—but in accordance with the principle which was illustrated in Abraham's intercession, and even in Lot's safety; namely, that the righteous are shields for others, as Paul had the lives of all that sailed with him given to him.

God's 'cannot' answers Lot's 'cannot.' His power is limited by His own solemn purpose to save His faltering servant. The latter had feared that, before he could reach the mountain, 'the evil' would overtake him. God shows him that his safety was a condition precedent to its outburst. Lot barred the way. God could not 'let slip the dogs of' judgment, but held them in the leash until Lot was in Zoar. Very awful is the command to make haste, based on this impossibility, as if God were weary of delay, and more than ready to smite. However we may find anthropomorphism in these early narratives, let us not forget that, when the world has long been groaning under some giant evil, and the bitter seed is grown up into a waving forest of poison, there is something in the passionless righteousness of God which brooks no longer delay, but seeks to make 'a short work' on the earth.

3. So we are brought face to face with the grim story of the destruction. There is a world of tragic meaning in the simple note of time given. 'The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar.' The low-lying cities of the plain would lie in shadow for some time before the sun topped the eastern hills. What a dawn! At that joyous hour, just when the sunshine struck down on the smiling plain, and lake and river gleamed like silver, and all things woke to new hopes and fresh life, then the sky darkened, and the earth sank, and horrible rain of fiery bitumen fell from the black pall, salt mud poured in streams, and over all hung a column of fat, oily smoke. It is not my province to discuss the physical cause of the destruction; but I may refer to the suggestions of Sir J. W. Dawson, in his *Egypt and Syria*, and in *The Expositor* for May 1886, in which he shows that great beds of bituminous limestone extend below the Jordan valley and much of the Dead Sea, and that the escape of inflammable gas from these through the opening of a fissure along a great 'line of fault,' is capable of producing all the effects described. The 'brimstone' of the Authorised Version is probably rather some form of bituminous matter which would be carried into the air by such

an escape of gas, and a thick saline mud would accompany the eruption, encrusting anything it reached. Subsidence would follow the ejection of quantities of such matter; and hence the word 'overthrew,' which seems inappropriate to a mere conflagration, would be explained.

But, however this may be, we have to recognise a supernatural element in the starting of the train of natural causes, as well as in the timing of the catastrophe, and a divine purpose of retribution, which turns the catastrophe, however effected, into a judgment.

So regarded, the event has a double meaning. In the first place, it is a revelation of an element in the divine character and of a feature in the divine government. To the men of that time, it might be a warning. To Abraham, and through him to his descendants, and through them to us, it preaches a truth very unwelcome to many in this day: that there is in God that which constrains Him to hate, fight against, and punish, evil. The temper of this generation turns away from such thoughts, and, in the name of the truth that 'God is love,' would fain obliterate the truth that He does and will punish. But if the punitive element be suppressed, and that in God which makes it necessary ignored or weakened, the result will be a God who has not force enough to love, but only weakly to indulge. If He does not hate and punish, He does not pardon. For the sake of the love of God, we must hold firm by the belief in the judgments of God. The God who destroyed Sodom is not merely the God of an earlier antiquated creed. 'Is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also of the Gentiles? Yea, of the Gentiles also.'

Again, this event is a prophecy. So our Lord has employed it; and much of the imagery in which the last judgment is represented is directly drawn from this narrative. So far from this story showing to us only the superstitions of a form of belief which we have long outgrown, its deepest meaning lies far ahead, and closes the history of man on the earth. We know from the lips which cannot lie, that the appalling suddenness of that destruction foreshadows the swiftness of the coming of that last 'day of the Lord.' We know that in literality some of the physical features shall be reproduced; for the fire which shall burn up the world and all its works is no figure, nor is it proclaimed only by such non-authoritative voices as those of Jesus and His apostles, but also by the modern possessors of infallible certitude, the men of science. We know that that day shall be a day of retribution. We know, too, that the crime of Sodom, foul and unnatural as it was, is not the darkest, but that its inhabitants (who have to face that judgment too) will find their doom more tolerable, and their sins lighter, than some who have had high places in the Church, than the Pharisees and wise men who have not taken Christ for their Saviour.

4. The fate of the loiterer. Her backward look must have been more than momentary, for the destruction of the cities did not begin till Lot was safe in Zoar. She must have lingered far behind, and been overtaken by the eruption of liquid saline mud, which, as Sir J. W. Dawson has shown, would attend or follow the outburst of bituminous matter, so that her fate was the natural consequence of her heart being still in Sodom. As to the 'pillar of salt,' which has excited cavils on the one hand and foolish legends

on the other, probably we are to think rather of a heap than of a pillar. The word does not occur in either meaning elsewhere, but its derivation implies something raised above the level of the ground; and a heap, such as would be formed by a human body encrusted with salt mud, would suit the requirements of the expression. Like a man who falls in a snow-storm, or, still more accurately, just as some of the victims at Pompeii stumbled in their flight, and were buried under the ashes, which still keep the outline of their figures, so Lot's wife was covered with the half-liquid slimy mud. Granted the delay in her flight, the rest is perfectly simple and natural. She was buried in a horrible tomb; and, in pity to her memory, no name has been written upon it. She remains to all generations, in a far truer sense than superstition dreamed of when it pointed to an upright salt rock as her prison and her monument, a warning of the danger of the backward look, which betrays the true home of the heart, and may leave us unsheltered in the open plain when the fiery storm bursts. 'Remember Lot's wife.'

When the angels awoke Lot, the day was breaking. By the time that Abraham had risen 'early in the morning,' and reached the place by his tent from which he had yesterday looked on the smiling plain, all was over, and the heavy smoke cloud wrapped the dead with its pall-like folds. So swift and sudden is to be the coming of the Son of man,—as the lightning which rushes in one fierce blinding flash from one side of heaven to the other. Wherefore, God calls to each of us: 'Escape for thy life; look not behind thee.'

FAITH TESTED AND CROWNED

'And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And He said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him. Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said unto his young men, 'Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together. And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together. And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And He said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from Me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said to this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.'—GENESIS xxii. 1-14.

I

A LIFE of faith and self-denial has usually its sharpest trials at or near its beginning. A stormy day has generally a calm close. But Abraham's sorest discipline came all sudden, like a bolt from blue sky. Near the end, and after many years of peaceful, uneventful life, he had to take a yet higher degree in the school of faith. Sharp trial means increased possession of God. So his last terrible experience turned to his crowning mercy.

1. The very first words of this solemn narrative raise many questions. We have God appointing the awful trial. The Revised Version properly re-

places 'tempt' by 'prove.' The former word conveys the idea of appealing to the worse part of a man, with the wish that he may yield and do the wrong. The latter means an appeal to the better part of a man, with the desire that he should stand. Temptation says: 'Do this pleasant thing; do not be hindered by the fact that it is wrong.' Trial, or proving, says: 'Do this right and noble thing; do not be hindered by the fact that it is painful.' The one is 'a sweet, beguiling melody,' breathing soft indulgence and relaxation over the soul; the other is a pealing trumpet-call to high achievements.

God's proving does not mean that He stands by, watching how His child will behave. He helps us to sustain the trial to which He subjects us. Life is all probation; and because it is so, it is all the field for the divine aid. The motive of His proving men is that they may be strengthened. He puts us into His gymnasium to improve our physique. If we stand the trial, our faith is increased; if we fall, we learn self-distrust and closer clinging to Him. No objection can be raised to the representation of this passage as to God's proving Abraham, which does not equally apply to the whole structure of life as a place of probation that it may be a place of blessing. But the manner of the trial here presents a difficulty. How could God command a father to kill his son? Is that in accordance with His character? Well, two considerations deserve attention. First, the final issue; namely, Isaac's deliverance, was an integral part of the divine purpose from the beginning of the trial; so that the question really is, Was it accordant with the divine character to require readiness to sacrifice even a son at His command? Second, that in Abraham's time, a father's right over his child's life was unquestioned, and that therefore this command, though it lacerated Abraham's heart, did not wound his conscience as it would do were it heard to-day. It is impossible to conceive of a divine injunction such as this being addressed to us. We have learned the inalienable sacredness of every life, and the awful prerogative and burden of individuality. God's command cannot enforce sin. But it was not wrong in Abraham's eyes for a father to slay his son; and God might shape His message to the form of the existing morality without derogation from His character, especially when the result of the message would be, among other things, to teach His abhorrence of human sacrifices, and so to lift the existing morality to a higher level.

2. The great body of the history sets before us Abraham standing the terrible test. What unsurpassable beauty is in the simple story! It is remarkable, even among the scriptural narratives, for the entire absence of anything but the visible facts. There is not a syllable about the feelings of father or of son. The silence is more pathetic than many words. We look as into a magic crystal, and see the very event before our eyes, and our own imaginations tell us more of the world of struggle and sorrow raging under that calm outside than the highest art could do. The pathos of reticence was never more perfectly illustrated. Observe, too, the minute, prolonged details of the slow progress to the dread instant of sacrifice. Each step is told in precisely the same manner, and the series of short clauses, coupled together by an artless 'and,' are like the single strokes of a passing bell, or the slow drops of blood heard falling from a fatal wound. The homely pre-

parations for the journey are made by Abraham himself. He makes no confidante of Sarah; only God and himself knew what that bundle of wood meant. What thoughts must have torn his soul throughout these weary days! How hard to keep his voice round and full while he spoke to Isaac! How much the long protracted tension of the march increased the sharpness of the test! It is easier to reach the height of obedient self-sacrifice in some moment of enthusiasm, than to keep up there through the commonplace details of slowly passing days. Many a faith, which could even have slain its dearest, would have broken down long before the last step of that sad journey was taken.

The elements of the trial were two: first, Abraham's soul was torn asunder by the conflict of fatherly love and obedience to God. The narrative intimates this struggle by continually insisting on the relationship between the two. The command dwells with emphasis on it: 'thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest.' He takes with him 'Isaac his son'; lays the wood on 'Isaac his son.' Isaac 'spake unto Abraham his father'; Abraham answers, 'Here am I, my son'; and again, 'My son, God will provide.' He bound 'Isaac his son'; he 'took the knife to slay his son'; and lastly, in the glad surprise at the end, he offers the ram 'in the stead of his son.' Thus, at every turn, the tender bond is forced on our notice, that we may feel how terrible was the task laid on him—to cut it asunder with his own hand. The friend of God must hold all other love as less than His, and must be ready to yield up the dearest at His bidding. Cruel as the necessity seems to flesh and blood, and specially poignant as his pain was, in essence Abraham's trial only required of him what all true religion requires of us. Some of us have been called by God's providence to give up the light of our eyes, the joy of our homes, to Him. Some of us have had to make the choice between earthly and heavenly love. All of us have to throne God in our hearts, and to let not the dearest usurp His place. In our weakness we may well shrink from such a test. But let us not forget that the trial of Abraham was not imposed by his own mistaken conceptions of duty, nor by a sterner God than the New Testament reveals, but is distinctly set before every Christian in essence, though not in form, by the gentle lips from which flowed the law of love more stringent and exclusive in its claims than any other: 'He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.'

The conflict in Abraham's soul had a still more painful aspect in that it seemed to rend his very religion into two. Faith in the promise on which he had been living all his life drew one way; faith in the later command, another. God seemed to be against God, faith against faith, promise against command. If he obeys now, what is to become of the hopes that had shone for years before him? His whole career will be rendered nugatory, and with his own hand he will crush to powder his life's work. That wonderful short dialogue which broke the stern silence of the journey seems to throw light on his mood. There is nothing in literature sacred or secular, fact or fiction, poetry or prose, more touching than the innocent curiosity of Isaac's boyish question, and the yearning self-restraint of the father's desperate and yet calm answer. But its value is not only in its pathos. It seems to show that, though he knew not how, still he held by the hope that somehow God would not forget

His promise. Out of his very despair, his faith struck, out of the flint of the hard command, a little spark which served to give some flicker of light amid the darkness. His answer to his boy does not make his sacrifice less, but his faith more. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews gives a somewhat different turn to his hopes, when he tells us that he offered up the heir of the promises, 'accounting that God was able to raise him from the dead.' Both ways of clinging to the early promise, even while obeying the later command, seem to have passed through his mind. The wavering from the one to the other is natural. He is sure that God had not lied before, and means what He commands now. He is sure that there is some point of reconciliation—perhaps this, perhaps that, but certainly somewhat. So he goes straight on the road marked for him, quite sure that it will not end in a blind alley, from which there is no exit. That is the very climax of faith—to trust God so absolutely, even when His ways seem contradictory, as to be more willing to believe apparent impossibilities than to doubt Him, and to be therefore ready for the hardest trial of obedience. We, too, have sometimes to take courses which seem to annihilate the hope and aims of a life. The lesson for us is to go straight on the path of clear duty wherever it leads. If it seem to bring us up to inaccessible cliffs, we may be sure that when we get there we shall find some ledge, though it may be no broader than a chamois could tread, which will suffice for a path. If it seem to bring us to a deep and bridgeless stream, we shall find a ford when we get to the water's edge. If the mountains seem to draw together and bar a passage, we shall find, when we reach them, that they open out; though it may be no wider than a cañon, still the stream can get through, and our boat with it.

3. So we have the climax of the story — faith rewarded. The first great lesson which the interposition of the Divine voice teaches us, is that obedience is complete when the inward surrender is complete. The outward act was needless. Abraham would have done no more if the flashing knife had buried itself in Isaac's heart. Here is the first great proclamation of the truth which revolutionises morality and religion, the beginnings of the teaching which culminates in the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount, and in the gospel of salvation, not by deeds, but through faith. The will is the man, the true action is the submission of the will. The outward deed is only the coarse medium through which it is made visible for men: God looks on purpose as performance.

Again, faith is rewarded by God's acceptance and approval. 'I know that thou fearest God,' not meaning that He learned the heart by the conduct, but that, on occasion of the conduct, He breathes into the obedient heart that calm consciousness of its service as recognised and accepted by Him, which is the highest reward that His friend can know. 'To be well pleasing to Him' is our noblest aim, which, cherished, makes sacrifice sweet, and all difficult things easy. 'Nor know we anything more fair Than is the smile upon Thy face.'

Again, faith is rewarded by a deeper insight into God's will. Much has been said about the sacrifice of Isaac in its bearing upon the custom of human sacrifice. We do not believe that Abraham was led to his act by a mistaken idea, borrowed from surrounding idolatries. His position as the sole monotheist amid these, the absence of evidence that human sacrifice was practised then among his neighbours, and, above all, the fact of the divine approval of his intention, forbid our acceptance of that theory. Nor can we regard the condemnation of such sacrifices as the main object of the incident. But no doubt an incidental result, and, we may perhaps say, a subsidiary purpose of it, was to stamp all such hideous usages with the brand of God's displeasure. The mode of thought which led to them was deeply rooted in the consciousness of the Old World, and corresponded to a true conception of the needs of humanity. The dark sense of sin, the conviction that it required expiation, and that procurable only by death, drove men to these horrid rites. And that ram, caught in the thicket, thorn-crowned and substituted for the human victim, taught Abraham and his sons that God appointed and provided a lamb for an offering. It was a lesson won by faith. Nor need we hesitate to see some dim forecast of the great Substitute whom God provided, who bears the sins of the world.

Again, faith is rewarded by receiving back the surrendered blessing, made more precious because it has been laid on the altar. How strange and solemn must have been the joy with which these two looked in each other's faces! What thankful wonder must have filled Abraham's heart as he loosed the cord that had bound his son! It would be many days before the thrill of gratitude died away, and the possession of his son seemed to Abraham, or that of life seemed to Isaac, a common thing. He was doubly now a child of wonder, born by miracle, delivered by miracle. So is it ever. God gives us back our sacrifices, tinged with a new beauty, and purified from earthly alloy.

We never know how sweet our blessings are till we have yielded them to Him. 'There is no man that hath left' anything or any person for Christ's sake and the gospel's who will not 'receive a hundred-fold more in this life, and in the world to come life everlasting.'

Lastly, Abraham was rewarded by being made a faint adumbration, for all time, of the yet more wondrous and awful love of the divine Father, who, for our sakes, has surrendered His only-begotten Son, whom He loved. Paul quotes the very words of this chapter when he says: 'He that *spared* not His *own Son*, but delivered Him up for us all.' Such thoughts carry us into dim regions, in which, perhaps, silence is best. Did some shadow of loss and pain pass over the divine all-sufficiency and joy, when He sent His Son? Was the unresisting innocence of the son a far-off likeness of the willing eagerness of the sinless Sufferer who chose to die? Was the resolved surrender of the father a faint prelude of the deep divine love which gave His only Son for us? Shall we not say, 'Now I know that Thou lovest me, because Thou hast not withheld Thy Son, Thine only Son, from me'? Shall we not recognise this as the crown of Abraham's reward, that his act of surrender of his dearest to God, his Friend, has been glorified by being made the mirror of God's unspeakable gift of His Son to us, his enemies?

THE CROWNING TEST AND TRIUMPH OF FAITH

II

THE first words of this lesson give the keynote for its meaning. 'God did prove Abraham'; the strange command was a test of his faith. In recent times the incident has been regarded chiefly as embodying a protest against child-sacrifices, and no doubt that is part of its intention, and their condemnation was part of its effect, but the other is the principal thing. Abraham, as the 'Father of the Faithful,' has his faith tested by a series of events from his setting out from Haran, and they culminate in this sharpest of all, the command to slay his son. The life of faith is ever a life of testing, and very often the fire that tries increases in heat as life advances. The worst conflicts are not always at the beginning of the war.

Our best way of knowing ourselves is to observe our own conduct, especially when it is hard to do nobly. We may easily cheat ourselves about what is the basis and ruling motive of our lives, but our actions will show it us. God does not 'test' us as if He did not know what was gold and what base metal, but the proving is meant to make clear to others and ourselves what is the worth and strength of our religion. The test is also a means of increasing the faith which it demonstrates, so that the exhortation to 'count it all joy' to have faith tried is no overstrained counsel of perfection.

The narrative plainly declares that the command to sacrifice his son was to Abraham unmistakably divine. The explanation that Abraham, living beside peoples who practised child-sacrifice, heard but the voice of his own conscience asking, 'Canst thou do for Jehovah what these do for Moloch?' does not correspond to the record. No doubt God does speak through conscience; but what sent Abraham on his terrible journey was a command which he knew did not spring up within, but came to him from above. We may believe or disbelieve the possibility or the actuality of such direct and distinguishable commands from God, but we do not face the facts of this narrative unless we recognise that it asserts that God made His will known to Abraham, and that Abraham knew that it was God's will, not his own thought.

But is it conceivable that God should ever bid a man commit a crime? To the question put in that bald way, of course there can be but one answer, No. But several conditions have to be taken into account. First, it is conceivable that God should test a man's willingness to surrender what is most precious to him, and what all his hopes are fixed on; and this command was given with the purpose that it should not be obeyed in fact, if the willingness to obey it was proved. Again, the stage of development of the moral sense at which Abraham stood has to be remembered. The child-sacrifices around him were not regarded as crimes, but as worship, and, while his affections were the same as ours, and his father's heart was wrung, to slay Isaac did not present itself to him as a crime in the way in which it does so to us. God deals with men on the moral and spiritual level to which they have attained, and, by descending to it, raises them higher.

The purpose of the command was to test faith, even more than to test whether earthly love or heavenly obedience were the stronger. There is a beautiful and instructive climax in the designations of Isaac in verse 2, where four times he is referred to, 'thy son, thine only son,' in whom all the hopes of fulfilment of the divine promise were concentrated, so that, if this fruit from the aged tree were cut off, no other could ever grow; 'whom thou lovest,'—there the sharp point pierces the father's heart; 'even Isaac,' in which name all the ties that knit him to Abraham are gathered up. Each word heightens the greatness of the sacrifice demanded, and is a fresh thrust of the dagger into Abraham's very life. Each suggests a reason for not slaying Isaac, which sense might plead. God does not hide the painfulness of surrender from us. The more precious the treasure is, the more are we bound to lay it on the altar. But it was Abraham's faith even more than his love that was tested. The Epistle to the Hebrews lays hold on this as the main element in the trial, that he who 'had received the promises' was called to do what seemed to blast all hope of their being fulfilled. What a cruel position to have God's command and God's promise apparently in diametrical opposition! But faith loosened even that seemingly inextricable tangle of contradiction, and felt that to obey was for man, and to keep His promise was for God. If we do our duty, He will see to the consequences. ''Tis mine to obey; 'tis His to provide.'

Nothing in literature is more tenderly touched or more truly imagined than that long, torturing journey —Abraham silent, Isaac silently wondering, the servants silently following. And, like a flash, at last 'the place' was seen afar off. How calmly Abraham speaks to the two followers, mastering his heart's throbbing even then! 'We will worship, and come again to you'—was that a 'pious fraud,' or did it not rather indicate that a ray of hope, like pale light from a shrouded sun, shone for him? He 'accounted that God was able to raise him up even from the dead.' Somehow, he knew not how, Isaac slain was still to live and inherit the promises. Anything was possible, but that God's word should fail was impossible. That picture of the father and son alone, the one bearing the wood, the other the fire and the knife, exchanging no word but once, when the innocent wonder of Isaac's question must have shaken Abraham's steadfastness, and made it hard for him to steady his voice to answer, touches the deepest springs of pity and pathetic sublimity. But the answer is in the same spirit as that to the servants, and indicates the same hope. 'God will provide Himself a lamb, my son.' He does not know definitely what he expects; he is ready to slay Isaac, but his faith is not quenched, though the end seems so inevitable and near. Faith was never more sharply tested, and never more triumphantly stood the test.

The divine solution of the riddle was kept back till the last moment, as it usually is. The place is slowly reached, the hill slowly climbed, the altar built, the unresisting Isaac bound (with what deep thoughts in each, who can tell?), the steady hand holding the glittering knife lifted—a moment more and it will be red with heart's blood, and not till then does God speak. It is ever so. The trial has 'its perfect work.' Faith is led to the edge of the precipice, one step farther and all is over. Then God speaks, all but just too late, and yet 'right early.' The willingness to make the sacrifice is tested to the utmost, and being proved, the sacrifice is not required.

Abraham had said to Isaac, 'God will provide a lamb,' and the word 'provide' is that which appears in the name he gave to the place—Jehovah-*jireh*. The name, then, commemorated, not the servant's faith but the Lord's mercy, and the spirit of it was embodied in what became a popular saying, 'In the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.' If faith dwells there, its surrenders will be richly rewarded. How much more dear was Isaac to Abraham as they journeyed back to Beersheba! And whatever we lay on God's altar comes back a 'hundred-fold more in this life,' and brings in the world to come life everlasting.

JEHOVAH-JIREH

'And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh; (that is, The Lord will provide).'—GENESIS xxii. 14.

As these two, Abraham and Isaac, were travelling up the hill, the son bearing the wood, and the father with the sad burden of the fire and the knife, the boy said: 'Where is the lamb?' and Abraham, thrusting down his emotion and steadying his voice, said: 'My son, God will provide Himself a lamb.' When the wonderful issue of the trial was plain before him, and he looked back upon it, the one thought that rose in his mind was of how, beyond his meaning, his words had been true. So he named that place by a name that spoke nothing of his trial, but everything of God's provision—'The Lord will see,' or 'The Lord will provide.'

1. The words have become proverbial and threadbare as a commonplace of Christian feeling. But it may be worth our while to ask for a moment what it was exactly that Abraham expected the Lord to provide. We generally use the expression in reference to outward things, and see in it the assurance that we shall not be left without the supply of the necessities for which, because God has made us to feel them, He has bound Himself to make provision. And most blessedly true is that application of them, and many a Christian heart in days of famine has been satisfied with the promise, when the bread that was given has been scant.

But there is a meaning deeper than that in the words. It is true, thank God! that we may cast all our anxiety about all outward things upon Him, in the assurance that He who feeds the ravens will feed us, and that if lilies can blossom into beauty without care, we shall be held by our Father of more value than these. But there is a deeper meaning in the provision spoken of here. What was it that God provided for Abraham? What is it that God provides for us? A way to discharge the arduous duties which, when they are commanded, seem all but impossible for us, and which, the nearer we come to them, look the more dreadful and seem the more impossible. And yet, when the heart has yielded itself in obedience, and we are ready to do the thing that is enjoined, there opens up before us a possibility provided by God, and strength comes to us equal to our day, and some unexpected gift is put into our hand, which enables us to do the thing of which Nature said: 'My heart will break before I can do it'; and in regard to which even Grace doubted whether it was possible for us to carry it through. If our hearts are set in obedience to the command, the farther we go on the path of obedience, the easier the command will appear, and to try to do it is to ensure that God will help us to do it.

This is the main provision that God makes, and it is the highest provision that He can make. For there is nothing in this life that we need so much as to do the will of our Father in heaven. All outward wants are poor compared with that. The one thing worth living for, the one thing which being secured we are blessed, and being missed we are miserable, is compliance in heart with the commandment of our Father; and that compliance wrought out in life. So, of all gifts that He bestows upon us, and of all the abundant provision out of His rich storehouses, is not this the best, that we are made ready for any required service? When we get to the place we shall find some lamb 'caught in the thicket by its horns'; and heaven itself will supply what is needful for our burnt offering.

And then there is another thought here which, though we cannot certainly say it was in the speaker's mind, is distinctly in the historian's intention, 'The Lord will provide.' Provide what? The lamb for the burnt offering which He has commanded. It seems probable that that bare mountain-top which Abraham saw from afar, and named Jehovah-jireh, was the mountain-top on which afterwards the Temple was built. And perhaps the wood was piled for the altar, on which Abraham was called to lay his only son, on that very piece of primitive rock which still stands visible, though Temple and altar have long since gone; and which for many a day was the place of the altar on which the sacrifices of Israel were offered. It is no mere forcing of Christian meanings on to old stories, but the discerning of that prophetic and spiritual element which God has impressed upon these histories of the past, especially in all their climaxes and crises, when we see in the fact that God provided the ram which became the appointed sacrifice, through which Isaac's life was preserved, a dim adumbration of the great truth that the only Sacrifice which God accepts for the world's sin is the Sacrifice which He Himself has provided.

This is the deepest meaning of all the sacrificial worship, as of Israel so of heathen nations—God Himself will provide a Lamb. The world had built altars, and Israel, by divine appointment, had its altar too. All these express the want which none of them can satisfy. They show that man needed a Sacrifice; and that Sacrifice God has provided. He asked from Abraham less than He gives to us. Abraham's devotion was sealed and certified because he did not withhold his son, his only son, from God. And God's love is sealed because He hath not withheld His only-begotten Son from us.

So this name that came from Abraham's grateful and wondering lips contains a truth which holds true in all regions of our wants. On the lowest level, the outward supply of outward needs; on a higher, the means of discharging hard duties and a path through sharp trials; and, on the highest of all, the spotless sacrifice which alone avails for the world's sins—these are the things which God provides.

2. So, note again on what conditions He provides them.

The incident and the name became the occasion of a proverb, as the historian tells us, which survived down to the period of his writing, and probably long after, when men were accustomed to say, 'In the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.' The provision of all sorts that we need has certain conditions as to the when and the where of the persons to whom it shall be granted. 'In the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.' If we wish to have our outward needs supplied, our outward weaknesses strengthened, power and energy sufficient for duty, wisdom for perplexity, a share in the Sacrifice which taketh away the sins of the world, we receive them all on the condition that we are found in the place where all God's provision is treasured. If a man chooses to sit outside the baker's shop, he may starve on its threshold. If a man will not go into the bank, his pockets will be empty, though there may be bursting coffers there to which he has a right. And if we will not ascend to the hill of the Lord, and stand in His holy place by simple faith, and by true communion of heart and life, God's amplest provision is nought to us; and we are empty in the midst of affluence. Get near to God if you would partake of what He has prepared. Live in fellowship with Him by simple love, and often meditate on Him, if you would drink in of His fulness. And be sure of this, that howsoever within His house the stores are heaped and the treasury full, you will have neither part nor lot in the matter, unless you are children of the house. 'In the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.' And round it there is a waste wilderness of famine and of death.

Further, note *when* the provision is realised.

When the man is standing with the knife in his hand, and next minute it will be red with the son's blood—then the call comes: 'Abraham!' and then he sees the ram caught in the thicket. There had been a long weary journey from their home away down in the dry, sunny south, a long tramp over the rough hills, a toilsome climb, with a breaking heart in the father's bosom, and a dim foreboding gradually stealing on the child's spirit. But there was no sign of respite or of deliverance. Slowly he piles together the wood, and yet no sign. Slowly he binds his boy, and lays him on it, and still no sign. Slowly, reluctantly, and yet resolvedly, he unsheathes the knife, and yet no sign. He lifts his hand, and then it comes.

That is God's way always. Up to the very edge we are driven, before His hand is put out to help us. Such is the law, not only because the next moment is always necessarily dark, nor because God will deal with us in any arbitrary fashion, and play with our fears, but because it is best for us that we should be forced to desperation, and out of desperation should 'pluck the flower, safety.' It is best for us that we should be brought to say, 'My foot slippeth!' and then, just as our toes are sliding upon the glacier, the help comes and 'Thy mercy held me up.' 'The Lord is her helper, and that right early.' When He delays, it is not to trifle with us, but to do us good by the sense of need, as well as by the experience of deliverance. At the last moment, never before it, never until we have found out how much we need it, and never too late, comes the Helper.

So 'it is provided' for the people that quietly and persistently tread the path of duty, and go wherever His hand leads them, without asking anything about where it does lead. The condition of the provision is our obedience of heart and will. To Abraham doing what he was commanded, though his heart was breaking as he did it, the help was granted—as it always will be.

3. And so, lastly, note what we are to do with the provision when we get it.

Abraham christened the anonymous mountain-top, not by a name that reminded him or others of his trial, but by a name that proclaimed God's deliverance. He did not say anything about his agony or about his obedience. God spoke about that, not Abraham. He did not want these to be remembered, but what he desired to hand on to later generations was what God had done for him. Oh! dear friends, is that the way in which we look back upon life? Many a bare, bald mountain-top in your career and mine we have got our names for. Are they names that commemorate our sufferings or God's blessings? When we look back on the past what do we see? Times of trial or times of deliverance? Which side of the wave do we choose to look at, the one that is smitten by the sunshine or the one that is all black and purple in the shadow? The sea looked at from the one side will be all a sunny path, and from the other dark as chaos. Let us name the heights that lie behind us, visible to memory, by names that commemorate, not the troubles that we had on them, but the deliverances that on them we received from God.

This name enshrines the duty of commemoration—ay! and the duty of expectation. 'The Lord will provide.' How do you know that, Abraham? and his answer is, 'Because the Lord did provide.' That is a shaky kind of argument if we use it about one another. Our resources may give out, our patience may weary. If it is a storehouse that we have to go to, all the corn that is treasured in it will be eaten up some day; but if it is to some boundless plain that grows it that we go, then we can be sure that there will be a harvest next year as there has been a harvest last. And so we have to think of God, not as a storehouse, but as the soil from which there comes forth, year by year and generation after generation, the same crop of rich blessings for the needs and the hungers of every soul. If we have to draw from reservoirs we cannot say, 'I have gone with my pitcher to the well six times, and I shall get it filled at the seventh.' It is more probable that we shall have to say, 'I have gone so often that I durst not go any more'; but if we have to go, not to a well, but to a fountain, then the oftener we go, the surer we become that its crystal cool waters will always be ready for us. 'Thou hast been with me in six troubles; and in seven thou wilt not forsake me,' is a bad conclusion to draw about one another; but it is the right conclusion to draw about God.

And so, as we look back upon our past lives, and see many a peak gleaming in the magic light of memory, let us name them all by names that will throw a radiance of hope on the unknown and unclimbed difficulties before us, and say, as the patriarch did when he went down from the mount of his trial and deliverance, 'The Lord will provide.'

GUIDANCE IN THE WAY

'I being in the way, the Lord led me.'—GENESIS xxiv. 27.

So said Abraham's anonymous servant when telling how he had found Rebekah at the well, and known her to be the destined bride of his master's servant. There is no more beautiful page, even amongst the many lovely ones in these ancient stories, than this domestic idyll of the mission of the faithful servant from far Canaan across the desert. The homely test by which he would determine that the maiden should be pointed out to him, the glimpse of old-world ways at the well, the gracious courtesy of the fair damsel, and the simple devoutness of the speaker, who recognises in what to others were trivial commonplaces God's guidance to the end which He had appointed, his recognition of the divine hand moving beneath all the nothings and littlenesses of daily life—may teach us much.

1. The first thing that these words seem to me to suggest is the conditions under which we may be sure that God leads—'I being in the way.'

Now, of course, some of you may know that the words of our text are, by the Revised Version and others, rendered so as to obliterate the clause telling where the speaker was when the Lord led him, and to make the whole a continuous expression of the one fact—'As for me, the Lord hath led me in the way to the house of my master's brethren.' The literal rendering is, 'I in the way, Jehovah led me.' No doubt the Hebrew idiom admits of the 'I' being thus emphatically premised, and then repeated as 'me' after the verb, and possibly no more is to be made of the words than that. But the fuller and more impressive meaning is possible, and I venture to retain it, and to see in it the expression of the truth that it is when we are 'in the way' that God will certainly lead us.

So that suggests, first, how the people that have any right to expect any kind of guidance from God are those who have their feet upon a path which conscience approves. Many men run into all manner of perplexities by their own folly and self-will, and never ask whether their acts are right or wrong, wise or foolish, until they begin to taste the bitter consequences. Then they cry to God to help them, and think themselves very religious because they do. That is *not* the way to get God's help. Such folk are like Italian brigands who had an image of the Virgin in their hats, and sometimes had the Pope's commission in their pockets, and therefore went out to murder and ravish, in sure and certain hope of God's favour and protection.

But when we are 'in the way,' and know that we are doing what we ought to do, and conscience says, 'Go on; never mind what stands against you,' it is then, and only then, that we have a right to be sure that the Lord will lead us. Otherwise, the best thing that can happen to us is that the Lord should thwart us when we are on the wrong road. Resistance, indeed, may be guidance; and it is often God's manner of setting our feet in the way of His steps. We have no claim on Him for guidance, indeed, unless we have submitted ourselves to His commandments; yet His mercies go beyond our claims. Just as the obedient child gets guidance, so the petulant and disobedient child gets resistance, which is guidance too. The angel of the Lord stands in front of Balaam, amongst the vines, though the seer sometimes does not see, and blocks the path for him, and hedges up the way with his flaming sword. Only, if we would have the sweet, gracious, companionable guidance of our Lord, let us be sure, to begin with, that we are 'in the way,' and not in any of the bypaths into which arrogance and self-will and fleshly desires and the like are only too apt to divert our feet.

Another consideration suggested by these words, 'I being in the way,' is that if we expect guidance we must diligently do present duty. We are led, thank God, by one step at a time. He does with His child, whom He is teaching to read His will, as we sometimes do with our children, when we are occupied in teaching them their first book-learning: we cover the page up, all but the line that we want them to concentrate their eyes upon; and then, when they have got to the end of that, slip the hand down, low enough to allow the next line to come into view. So often God does with us. One thing at a time is enough for the little brains. And this is the condition of mortal life, for the most part—though there do come rare exceptions. Not that we have to look a long way ahead, and forecast what we shall do this time ten years off, or to make decisions that involve a distant future—except once or twice in a lifetime—but that we have to settle what is to be done in this flying minute, and in the one adjacent to it. 'Do the duty that lies nearest thee,' and the remoter duty will become clearer. There is nothing that has more power to make a man's path plain before his feet than that he should concentrate his better self on the manful and complete discharge of the present moment's service. And, on the other hand, there is nothing that will so fill our sky with mists, and blur the marks of the faint track through the moor, as present negligence, or still more, present sin. Iron in a ship's hull makes the magnet tremble, and point away from its true source. He that has complied with evil to-day is the less capable of discerning duty to-morrow; and he that does all the duty that he knows will thereby increase the probability that he will know all that he needs. 'If any man wills to do His will, he shall know of the teaching'—enough, at any rate, to direct his steps.

But there is another lesson still in the words; and that is that, if we are to be guided, we must see to it that we expect and obey the guidance.

This servant of Abraham's, with a very imperfect knowledge of the divine will, had, when he set out on his road, prayed very earnestly that God would lead him. He had ventured to prescribe a certain token, naïve in its simplicity: 'If the girl drops her pitcher, and gives us drink gladly, and does not grudge to fill the troughs for the cattle, that will show that she is of a good sort, and will make the right wife for Isaac.' He had prayed thus, and he was ready to accept whomsoever God so designated. He had not made up his mind, 'Bethuel's daughter is a relation of my master's, and so she will be a suitable wife for his son.' He left it all with God, and then he went straight on his road, and was perfectly sure that he would get the guidance that he had sought. And when it came the good man bowed and obeyed.

Now there is a picture for us all. There are many people that say, 'O Lord! guide me,' when all the while they mean, 'Let me guide Thee.' They are perfectly willing to accept the faintest and most questionable indications that may seem to point down the road where their inclination drives them, and like Lord Nelson at Copenhagen, will put the telescope to the blind eye when the flag is flying at the admiral's peak, signalling 'Come out of action,' because they are determined to stay where they are.

Do not let us forget that the first condition of securing real guidance in our daily life is to ask it, and that the next is to look for it, and that a third is to be quite willing to accept it, whether the finger points down the broad road that we would like to go upon, or through some tangled path amongst the brushwood that we would fain avoid. And if you and I, dear brethren, in the littlenesses of our daily life, do fulfil these conditions, the heavens will crumble, and earth will melt, before God will leave His child untaught in the way in which he should go.

Only, let us be patient. Do you remember what Joshua said to the Israelites? 'Let there be a good space of vacant ground between you and the guiding ark, that you may know by which way you ought to go.' When men precipitately press on the heels of half-disclosed providences, they are uncommonly apt to mistake the road. We must wait till we are sure of God's will before we try to do it. If we are not sure of what He would have us do, then, for the present, He would have us do nothing until He speaks. 'I being in the way, the Lord led me.'

2. Now a word about the manner of the guidance.

There was no miracle, no supernatural voice, no pillar of cloud or fire, no hovering glory round the head of the village maiden. All the indications were perfectly natural and trivial. A thousand girls had gone to the wells that day all about Haran and done the very same things that Rebekah did. But the devout man who had prayed for guidance, and was sure that he was getting it, was guided by her most simple, commonplace act; and that is how we are usually to be guided. God leaves a great deal to our common sense. His way of speaking to common sense is by very common things. If any of us fancy that some glow at the heart, some sudden flash as of inspiration, is the test of a divine commandment, we have yet to learn the full meaning of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. For that Incarnation, amongst all its other mighty influences, hallowed the commonest things of life and turned them into ministers of God's purposes. So remember, God's guidance may come to you through so insignificant a girl as Rebekah. It may come to you through as commonplace an incident as tipping the water of a spring out of an earthen pot into a stone trough. None the less is it God's guidance; and what we want is the eye to see it. He will guide us by very common indications of His providence.

3. And now, the last thing that I would say a word about is the realisation in daily life of this guidance as a plain actual fact.

This anonymous trusted servant of Abraham's, whose name we should like to have known, had a mere segment of the full orb of the knowledge of God that shines upon our path. With true Oriental freedom to speak about the deepest matters, he was not afraid nor ashamed to stand before Bethuel and Laban, and all these other strangers that crowded round the doorway, and say, 'The Lord led me.' There is a pattern for some of us tongue-tied, shamefaced Christians. Whatever may be the truth about the degradations of which heathen religion is full, there is a great deal in heathen religion that ought to teach, and does teach, Christendom a lesson, as to willingness to recognise and to confess God's working in daily life. It may be very superficial; it may be very little connected with high morality; but so far as it goes it is a thousand-fold better than the dumb religion that characterises such hosts of Christian people.

A realisation of the divine guidance is the talisman that makes crooked things straight and rough places plain; that brings peace and calmness into our hearts, amid all changes, losses, and sorrows. If we hold fast by that faith, it will interpret for us the mysterious in the providences concerning our own lives, and will help us to feel that, as I said, resistance to our progress may be true guidance, and thwarting our wills may be our highest good. For the road which we travel should, in all its turnings, lead us to God; and whatsoever guides us to Him is only and always blessed.

May I, for one moment, turn these words in another direction, and remind you, dear friends, of how the sublimest application of them is still to be realised? As a climber on a mountain-peak may look down the vale up which he had painfully toiled for many days and see the dusty path lying, like a sinuous snake, down all along it, so, when we get up yonder, 'Thou shalt remember all the way by which the Lord thy God hath led thee these many years in the wilderness,' and shalt see the green pastures and the still waters, valleys of the shadow of death, and burning roads with sharp flints, which have all brought thee hither at last. We shall know then what we believe now, that the Lord does indeed go before them who desire to follow Him, and that the God of Israel is their rereward. Then we shall say with deepened thankfulness, deepened by complete understanding of life here, seen in the light of its attained end, 'I being in the way, the Lord led me,' and 'I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.'

THE DEATH OF ABRAHAM

'Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people.'—GENESIS xxv. 8.

'FULL of years' does not seem to me to be a mere synonym for longevity. That would be an intolerable tautology, for we should then have the same thing said three times over—'an old man,' 'in a good old age,' 'full of years.' There must be some other idea than that in the words. If you notice that the expression is by no means a usual one, that it is only applied to one or two of the Old Testament characters, and those selected characters, I think you will see that there must be some other significance in it than merely to point to length of days.

It may be well to note the instances. In addition to our text, we find it employed, first, in reference to Isaac, in Genesis xxxv. 29, where the words are repeated almost *verbatim.* That calm, contemplative life, so unlike the active, varied career of his father, also attained to this blessing at its close. Then we find that the stormy and adventurous course of the great king David, with its wonderful alternations both of moral character and of fortune, is represented as being closed at last with this tranquil evening glory: 'He died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour.' Once more we read of the great high priest Jehoiada, whose history had been crowded with peril, change, brave resistance, and strenuous effort, that with all the storms behind him he died at last, 'full of days.' The only other instance of the occurrence of the phrase is at the close of the book of Job, the typical record of the good man suffering, and of the abundant compensations given by a loving God. The fair picture of returning prosperity and family joy, like the calm morning sunshine after a night of storm and wreck, with which that wonderful book ends, has this for its last touch, evidently intended to deepen the impression of peace which is breathed over it all: 'So Job died, being old and full of days.' These are all the instances of the occurrence of this phrase, and I think we may fairly say that in all it is meant to suggest not merely length of days, but some characteristic of the long life over and above its mere length. We shall, I think, understand its meaning a little better if we make a very slight and entirely warranted change, and instead of reading '*full* of years,' read '*satisfied* with years.' The men were satisfied with life; having exhausted its possibilities, having drunk a full draught, having nothing more left to wish for. The words point to a calm close, with all desires gratified, with hot wishes stilled, with no desperate clinging to life, but a willingness to let it go, because all which it could give had been attained.

So much for one of the remarkable expressions in this verse. There is another, 'He was gathered to his people,' of which we shall have more to say presently. Enough for the present to note the peculiarity, and to suggest that it seems to contain some dim hint of a future life, and some glimmer of some of the profoundest thoughts about it.

We have two main things to consider.

1. The tranquil close of a life.

It is possible, then, at the end of life to feel that it has satisfied one's wishes. Whether it does or no will depend mostly on ourselves, and very slightly on our circumstances. Length of days, competence, health, and friends are important; but neither these nor any other externals will make the difference between a life which, in the retrospect, will seem to have been sufficient for our desires, and one which leaves a hunger in the heart. It is possible for us to make our lives of such a sort, that whether they run on to the apparent maturity of old age, or whether they are cut short in the midst of our days, we may rise from the table feeling that it has satisfied our desires, met our anticipation, and been all very good.

Possibly, that is not the way in which most of us look at life. That is not the way in which a great many of us seem to think that it is an eminent part of Christian and religious character to look at life. But it is the way in which the highest type of devotion and the truest goodness always look at it. There are people, old and young, who, whenever they look back, whether it be over a long tract of years or over a short one, have nothing to say about it except: 'Vanity of vanities! all is vanity and vexation of spirit'; a retrospect of weary disappointments and thwarted plans.

How different with some of us the forward and the backward look! Are there not some listening to me, whose past is so dark that it flings black shadows over their future, and who can only cherish hopes for to-morrow, by giving the lie to and forgetting the whole of their yesterdays? It is hard to paint the regions before us like 'the Garden of the Lord,' when we know that the locusts of our own godless desires have made all the land behind us desolate. If your past has been a selfish past, a godless past, in which passion, inclination, whim, anything but conscience and Christ have ruled, your remembrances can scarcely be tranquil; nor your hopes bright. If you have only 'prospects drear,' when you 'backward cast your eye,' it is not wonderful if 'forwards though you cannot see,' you will 'guess and fear.' Such lives, when they come towards an end, are wont to be full of querulous discontent and bitterness. We have all seen godless old men cynical and sour, pleased with nothing, grumbling, or feebly complaining, about everything, dissatisfied with all which life has thus far yielded them, and yet clinging desperately to it, and afraid to go.

Put by the side of such an end this calm picture of the old man going down into his grave, and looking back over all those long days since he came away from his father's house, and became a pilgrim and a stranger. How all the hot anxieties, desires, occupations, of youth have quieted themselves down! How far away now seem the warlike days when he fought the invading kings! How far away the heaviness of heart when he journeyed to Mount Moriah with his boy, and whetted the knife to slay his son! His love had all been buried in Sarah's grave. He has been a lonely man for many years; and yet he looks back, as God looked back over His creative week, and feels that all has been good. 'It was all for the best; the great procession of my life has been ordered from the beginning to its end, by the Hand that shapes beauty everywhere, and has made all things blessed and sweet. I have drunk a full draught; I have had enough; I bless the Giver of the feast, and push my chair back; and get up and go away.' He died an old man, and satisfied with his life.

Ay! And what a contrast that makes, dear friends, to another set of people. There is nothing more miserable than tc see a man, as his years go by, gripping harder and tighter at this poor, fleeting world that is slipping away from him; nothing sadder than to see how, as opportunities and capacities for the enjoyment of life dwindle, and dwindle, and dwindle, people become almost fierce in the desire to keep it. Why, you can see on the face of many an old man and woman a hungry discontent, that has not come from the mere wrinkles of old age or care; an eager acquisitiveness looking out of the dim old eyes, tragical and awful. It is sad to see a man, as the world goes from him, grasping at its skirts as a beggar does at the retreating passer-by that refuses him an alms. Are there not some of us who feel that this is our case, that the less we have before us of life here on earth, the more eagerly we grasp at the little which still remains; trying tc get some last drops out of the broken cistern which we know can hold no water? How different this blessed acquiescence in the fleeting away of the fleeting; and this contented satisfaction with the portion that has been given him, which this man had who died willingly, being satisfied with life!

Sometimes, too, there is satiety—weariness of life which is not satisfaction, though it looks like it. Its language is: 'Man delights me not; nor woman neither. I am tired of it all.' Those who feel thus sit at the table without an appetite. They think that they have seen to the bottom of everything, and they have found everything a cheat. They expect nothing new under the sun; that which is to be hath already been, and it is all vanity and striving after the wind. They are at once satiated and dissatisfied. Nothing keeps the power to charm.

How different from all this is the temper expressed in this text, rightly understood! Abraham had had a richly varied life. It had brought him all he wished. He has drunk a full draught, and needs no more. He is satisfied, but that does not mean loss of interest in present duties, occupations, or enjoyments. It is possible to keep ourselves fully alive to all these till the end, and to preserve something of the keen edge of youth even in old age, by the magic of communion with God, purity of conduct, and a habitual contemplation of all events as sent by our Father. When Paul felt himself very near his end, he yet had interest enough in common things to tell Timothy all about their mutual friends' occupations, and to wish to have his books and parchments.

So, calmly, satisfied and yet not sickened, keenly appreciating all the good and pleasantness of life, and yet quite willing to let it go, Abraham died. So may it be with us too, if we will, no matter what the duration or the externals of our life. If we too are his children by faith, we shall be 'blessed with faithful Abraham.' And I beseech you to ask yourselves whether the course of your life is such as that, if at this moment God's great knife were to come down and cut it in two, you would be able to say, 'Well! I have had enough, and now contentedly I go.'

Again, it is possible at the end of life to feel that it is complete, because the days have accomplished for us the highest purpose of life. Scaffoldings are for buildings, and the moments and days and years of our earthly lives are scaffolding. What are you building inside the scaffolding, brother? What kind of a structure will be disclosed when the scaffolding is knocked away? What is the end for which days and years are given? That they may give us what eternity cannot take away—a character built upon the love of God in Christ, and moulded into His likeness. 'Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him for ever.' Has your life helped you to do that? If it has, though you be but a child, you are full of years; if it has not, though your hair be whitened with the snows of the nineties, you are yet incomplete and immature. The great end of life is to make us like Christ, and pleasing to Christ. If life has done that for us, we have got the best out of it, and our life is completed, whatever may be the number of the days. Quality, not quantity, is the thing that determines the perfectness of a life. And like as in northern lands, where there is only a week or two from the melting of the snow to the cutting of the hay, the whole harvest of a life may be gathered in a very little space, and all be done which is needed to make the life complete. Has your life this completeness? Can you be 'satisfied' with it, because the river of the flowing hours has borne down some grains of gold amidst the mass of mud, and, notwithstanding many sins and failures, you have thus far fulfilled the end of your being, that you are in some measure trusting and serving the Lord Jesus Christ?

Again, it is possible, at the end of life, to be *willing* to go as satisfied.

Most men cling to life in grim desperation, like a climber to a cliff giving way, or a drowning man clutching at any straw. How beautiful the contrast of the placid, tranquil acquiescence expressed in that phrase of our text! No doubt there will always be the shrinking of the bodily nature from death. But that may be overcome. There is no passion so weak but in some case it has 'mated and mastered the fear of death,' and it is possible for us all to come to that temper in which we shall be ready for either fortune, to live and serve Him here, or to die and enjoy Him yonder. Or, to return to an earlier illustration, it is possible to be like a man sitting at table, who has had his meal, and is quite contented to stay on there, restful and cheerful, but is not unwilling to put back his chair, to get up and to go away, thanking the Giver for what he has received.

Ah! that is the way to face the end, dear brethren, and how is it to be done? Such a temper need not be the exclusive possession of the old. It may belong to us at all stages of life. How is it won? By a life of devout communion with God. The secret of it lies in obeying the commandment and realising the truth which Abraham realised and obeyed: 'I am the Almighty God, walk before Me, and be thou perfect.' 'Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield and thine exceeding great reward.' That is to say, a simple communion with God, realising His presence and feeling that He is near, will sweeten disappointment, will draw from it its hidden blessedness, will make us victors over its pains and its woes. Such a faith will make it possible to look back and see only blessing; to look forward and see a great light of hope burning in the darkness. Such a faith will check weariness, avert satiety, promote satisfaction, and will help us to feel that life and the great hereafter are but the outer and inner mansions of the Father's house, and death the short though dark corridor between. So we shall be ready for life or for death.

2. Now I must turn to consider more briefly the glimpse of the joyful society beyond, which is given us in that other remarkable expression of our text: 'He was gathered to his people.'

That phrase is only used in the earlier Old Testament books, and there only in reference to a few persons. It is used of Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and Aaron, and once (Judges ii. 10) of a whole generation. If you will weigh the words, I think you will see that there is in them a dim intimation of something beyond this present life.

'He was gathered to his people' is not the same thing as 'He died,' for, in the earlier part of the verse, we read, 'Abraham gave up the ghost and died . . . and was gathered to his people.' It is not the same thing as being buried. For we read in the following verse: 'And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron, the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre.' It is then the equivalent neither of death nor of burial. It conveys dimly and veiledly that Abraham was buried, and yet that was not all that happened to him. He was buried, but also 'he was gathered to his people.' Why! his own 'people' were buried in Mesopotamia, and his grave was far away from theirs. What is the meaning of the expression? Who were the people he was gathered to? In death or in burial, 'the dust returns to the earth as it was.' What was it that was gathered to his people?

Dimly, vaguely, veiledly, but unmistakably, as it seems to me, is here expressed at least a premonition and feeling after the thought of an immortal self in Abraham that was not there in what 'his sons Isaac and Ishmael laid in the cave at Machpelah,' but was somewhere else and was for ever. That is the first thing hinted at here—the continuance of the personal being after death.

Is there anything more? I think there is. Now, remember, Abraham's whole life was shaped by that commandment, 'Get thee out from thy father's house, and from thy kindred, and from thy country.' He never dwelt with his kindred; all his days he was a pilgrim and a sojourner, a stranger in a strange land. And though he was living in the midst of a civilisation which possessed great cities whose walls reached to heaven, he pitched his tent beneath the terebinth tree at Mamre, and would have nothing to do with the order of things around him, but remained an exotic, a waif, an outcast in the midst of Canaan all his life. Why? Because he 'looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God.' And now he has gone to it, he is gathered to his people. The life of isolation is over, the true social life is begun. He is no longer separated from those around him, or flung amidst those that are uncongenial to him. 'He is gathered to his people'; he dwells with his own tribe; he is at home; he is in the city.

And so, brethren, life for every Christian man must be lonely. After all communion we dwell as upon islands dotted over a great archipelago, each upon his little rock, with the sea dashing between us; but the time comes when, if our hearts are set upon that great Lord, whose presence makes us one, there shall be no more sea, and all the isolated rocks shall be parts of a great continent. Death sets the solitary in families. We are here like travellers plodding lonely through the night and the storm, but soon to cross the threshold into the lighted hall, full of friends.

If we cultivate that sense of detachment from the present, and of having our true affinities in the unseen, if we dwell here as strangers because our citizenship is in heaven, then death will not drag us away from our associates, nor hunt us into a lonely land, but will bring us where closer bonds shall knit the 'sweet societies' together, and the sheep shall couch close by one another, because all are gathered round the one shepherd. Then many a broken tie shall be rewoven, and the solitary wanderer meet again the dear ones whom he had 'loved long since, and lost awhile.'

Further, the expressions suggest that in the future men shall be associated according to affinity and character. 'He was gathered to his people,' whom he was like and who were like him; the people with whom he had sympathy, the people whose lives were shaped after the fashion of his own.

Men will be sorted there. Gravitation will come into play undisturbed; and the pebbles will be ranged according to their weights on the great shore where the sea has cast them up, as they are upon Chesil beach, down there in the English Channel, and many another coast besides; all the big ones together and sized off to the smaller ones, regularly and steadily laid out. Like draws to like. Our spiritual affinities, our religious and moral character, will settle where we shall be, and who our companions will be when we get yonder. Some of us would not altogether like to live with the people that are like ourselves, and some of us would not find the result of this sorting to be very delightful. Men in the Dantesque circles were only made more miserable because all around them were of the same sort as, and some of them worse than, themselves. And an ordered hell, with no company for the liar but liars, and none for the thief but thieves, and none for impure men but the impure, and none for the godless but the godless, would be a hell indeed.

'He was gathered to his people,' and you and I will be gathered likewise. What is the conclusion of the whole matter? Let us follow with our thoughts, and in our lives, those who have gone into the light, and cultivate in heart and character those graces and excellences which are congruous with the inheritance of the saints in light. Above all, let us give our hearts to Christ, by simple faith in Him, to be shaped and sanctified by Him. Then our country will be where He is, and our people will be the people in whom His love abides, and the tribe to which we belong will be the tribe of which He is Chieftain. So when our turn comes, we may rise thankfully from the table in the wilderness, which He has spread for us, having eaten as much as we desired, and quietly follow the dark-robed messenger whom His love sends to bring us to the happy multitudes that throng the streets of the city. There we shall find our true home, our kindred, our King. 'So shall we ever be with the Lord.'

A BAD BARGAIN

'And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob. And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint: And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom. And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright.'

GENESIS xxv. 27-34.

ISAAC'S small household represented a great variety of types of character. He himself lacked energy, and seems in later life to have been very much of a tool in the hands of others. Rebekah had the stronger nature, was persistent, energetic, and managed her husband to her heart's content. The twin brothers were strongly opposed in character; and, naturally enough, each parent loved best the child that was most unlike him or her: Isaac rejoicing in the very wildness of the adventurous, dashing Esau; and Rebekah finding an outlet for her womanly tenderness in an undue partiality for the quiet lad that was always at hand to help her and be petted by her.

One's sympathy goes out to Esau. He was 'a man of the field,'—by which is meant, not cultivated ground, but open country, which we might call prairie. He was a 'backwoodsman,'—liked the wild hunter's life better than sticking at home looking after sheep. He had the attractive characteristics of that kind of men, as well as their faults. He was frank, impulsive, generous, incapable of persevering work or of looking ahead, passionate. His descendants prefer cattle-ranching and gold-prospecting to keeping shops or sitting with their lungs squeezed against a desk.

Jacob had neither the high spirits nor the animal courage of his brother. He was 'a plain man.' The word is literally 'perfect,' but cannot be used in its deepest sense; for Jacob was very far indeed from being that, but seems to have a lower sense, which might perhaps be represented by 'steady-going,' or 'respectable,' in modern phraseology. He went quietly about his ordinary work, in contrast with his daring brother's escapades and unsettledness.

The two types are intensified by civilisation, and the antagonism between them increased. City life tends to produce Jacobs, and its Esaus escape from it as soon as they can. But Jacob had the vices as well as the virtues of his qualities. He was orderly and domestic, but he was tricky, and keenly alive to his own interest. He was persevering and almost dogged in his tenacity of purpose, but he was not above taking mean advantages and getting at his ends by miry roads. He had little love for his brother, in whom he saw an obstacle to his ambition. He had the virtues and vices of the commercial spirit.

But we judge the two men wrongly if we let ourselves be fascinated, as Isaac was, by Esau, and forget that the superficial attractions of his character cover a core worthy of disapprobation. They are crude judges of character who prefer the type of man who spurns the restraints of patient industry and order; and popular authors, who make their heroes out of such, err in taste no less than in morals. There is a very unwholesome kind of literature, which is devoted to glorifying the Esaus as fine fellows, with spirit, generosity, and noble carelessness, whereas at bottom they are governed by animal impulses, and incapable of estimating any good which does not appeal to sense, and that at once.

The great lesson of this story lies on its surface. It is the folly and sin of buying present gratification of appetite or sense at the price of giving up far greater future good. The details are picturesquely told. Esau's eagerness, stimulated by the smell of the mess of lentils, is strikingly expressed in the Hebrew: 'Let me devour, I pray thee, of that red, that red there.' It is no sin to be hungry, but to let appetite speak so clamorously indicates feeble self-control. Jacob's coolness is an unpleasant foil to Esau's impatience, and his cautious bargaining, before he will sell what a brother would have given, shows a mean soul, without generous love to his own flesh and blood. Esau lets one ravenous desire hide everything else from him. He wants the pottage which smokes there, and that one poor dish is for the moment more to him than birthright and any future good. Jacob knows the changeableness of Esau's character, and is well aware that a hungry man will promise anything, and, when fed, will break his promise as easily as he made it. So he makes Esau swear; and Esau will do that, or anything asked. He gets his meal. The story graphically describes the greedy relish with which he ate, the short duration of his enjoyment, and the dark meaning of the seemingly insignificant event, by that accumulation of verbs, 'He did eat and drink, and rose up and went his way: so Esau despised his birthright.'

Now we may learn, first, how profound an influence small temptations, yielded to, may exert on a life

Many scoffs have been directed against this story, as if it were unworthy of credence that eating a dish of lentils should have shaped the life of a man and of his descendants. But is it not always the case that trifles turn out to be determining points? Hinges are very small, compared with the doors which move on them. Most lives are moulded by insignificant events. No temptation is small, for no sin is small; and if the occasion of yielding to sense and the present is insignificant, the yielding is not so.

But the main lesson is, as already noted, the madness of flinging away greater future good for present gratifications of sense. One cannot suppose that the spiritual side of 'the birthright' was in the thoughts of either brother. Esau and Jacob alike regarded it only as giving the headship of the family. It was merely the right of succession, with certain material accompanying advantages, which Jacob coveted and Esau parted with. But even in regard to merely worldly objects, the man who lives for only the present moment is distinctly beneath him who lives for a future good, however material it may be. Whoever subordinates the present, and is able steadily to set before himself a remote object, for which he is strong enough to subdue the desire of immediate gratifications of any sort, is, in so far, better than the man who, like a savage or an animal, lives only for the instant.

The highest form of that nobility is when time is clearly seen to be the 'lackey to eternity,' and life's aims are determined with supreme reference to the future beyond the grave. But how many of us are every day doing exactly as Esau did—flinging away a great future for a small present! A man who lives only for such ends as may be attained on this side of the grave is as 'profane' a person as Esau, and despises his birthright as truly. He knew that he was hungry, and that lentil porridge was good. 'What good shall the birthright do me?' He failed to make the effort of mind and imagination needed in order to realise how much of the kind of 'good' that he could appreciate it would do to him. The smell of the smoking food was more to him than far greater good which he could only appreciate by an effort. A sixpence held close to the eye can shut out the sun. Resolute effort is needed to prevent the small, intrusive present from blotting out the transcendent greatness of the final future. And for lack of such effort men by the thousand fling themselves away.

To sell a birthright for a bowl of lentils was plain folly. But is it wiser to sell the blessedness and peace of communion with God here and of heaven hereafter for anything that earth can yield to sense or to soul? How many shrewd 'men of the highest commercial standing' are making as bad a bargain as Esau's! The 'pottage' is hot and comforting, but it is soon eaten; and when the bowl is empty, and the sense of hunger comes back in an hour or two, the transaction does not look quite as advantageous as it did. Esau had many a minute of rueful meditation on his bad bargain before he in vain besought his father's blessing. And suspicions of the folly of their choice are apt to haunt men who prefer the present to the future, even before the future becomes the present, and the folly is manifest. 'What doth it profit a man, to gain the whole world, and forfeit his life?'

So a character like Esau's, though it has many fine possibilities about it, and attracts liking, is really of a low type, and may very easily slide into depths of degrading sensualism, and be dead to all nobleness. Enterprise, love of stirring life, impatience of dull plodding, are natural to young lives. Unregulated, impulsive characters, who live for the moment, and are very sensitive to all material delights, have often an air of generosity and joviality which hides their essential baseness; for it *is* base to live for flesh, either in more refined or more frankly coarse forms. It is base to be incapable of seeing an inch beyond the present. It is base to despise any good that cannot minister to fleeting lusts or fleshly pleasures, and to say of high thought, of ideal aims of any sort, and most of all to say of religion, 'What good will it do me?' To estimate such precious things by the standard of gross utility is like weighing diamonds in grocers' scales. They will do very well for sugar, but not for precious stones. The sacred things of life are not those which do what the Esaus recognise as 'good.' They have another purpose, and are valuable for other ends. Let us take heed, then, that we estimate things according to their true relative worth; that we live, not for to-day, but for eternity; and that we suppress all greedy cravings. If we do not, we shall be 'profane' persons like Esau, 'who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.'

POTTAGE *VERSUS* BIRTHRIGHT

'Esau despised his birthright.'—GENESIS xxv. 34.

BROAD lessons unmistakable, but points strange and difficult to throw oneself back to so different a set of ideas. So

I. Deal with the narrative.

Not to tell it over again, but bring out the following points:—

(*a*) Birthright.—What?

None of them any notion of sacred, spiritual aspect of it.

To all, merely material advantages: headship of the clan. All the loftier aspects gone from Isaac, who thought he could give it for venison, from Esau, and from the scheming Rebekah and the crafty Jacob.

(*b*) The Bargain.

It is not clear whether the transaction was seriously meant, or whether it only shows Jacob's wish to possess the birthright and Esau's indifference to it.

At any rate, the barter was not supposed to complete Jacob's title, as is shown by a subsequent piece of trickery.

Isaac's blessing was conceived to confer it; that blessing, if once given, could not be revoked, even if procured by fraud and given in error.

The belief would fulfil itself, as far as the chieftainship was concerned.

It is significant of the purely 'secular' tone of all the parties concerned that only temporal blessings are included in Isaac's words.

(*c*) The Scripture judgment on all parties concerned.

Great mistakes are made by forgetting that the Bible is a passionless narrator of its heroes' acts, and seldom pauses to censure or praise—so people have thought that Scripture gave its vote for Jacob as against Esau.

The character of the two men.

Esau—frank, impulsive, generous, chivalrous, careless, and sensuous.

Jacob—meditative, reflective, pastoral, timid, crafty, selfish. Each has the defects of his qualities.

But the subsequent history of Jacob shows what heaven thought of him.

This dirty transaction marred his life, sent him a terrified exile from Isaac's tent, and shook his soul long years after with guilty apprehensions when he had to meet Esau.

All subsequent career to beat his crafty selfishness out of him and to lift him to higher level.

II. Broad General Lessons.

1. The Choice.—Birthright *versus* Pottage.

(*a*) The Present *versus* The Future.

Suppose it true that to both brothers the birthright seemed to secure merely material advantage, yet even so the better part would have been to sacrifice material present for material future. Even on plane of worldly things, to live for to-morrow ennobles a man, and he is the higher style of man who 'spurns delights and lives laborious days' for some issue to be realised in the far future.

The very same principle extended leads to the conviction that the highest wisdom is his who lives for the furthest, which is also the most certain, Future.

(b) The Seen *versus* The Unseen.

However material the advantages of the birthright were supposed to be, they *then* appealed to imagination, not sense. *There* was the pottage in the pan: 'I can see that and smell it. This birthright, can I eat *it*? Let me get the solid realities, and let who will have the imaginary.'

So the unseen good things, such as intellectual culture, fair reputation, and the like, are better than the gross satisfactions that can be handled, or tasted, or seen.

And, on the very same principle, high above the seeker after these—as high as he is above the drunkard—is the Christian, whose life is shaped by the loftiest Unseen, even 'Him who is invisible.'

2. The grim absurdity of the choice.

The story seems to have a certain undertone of sarcasm, and a keen perception of the immense stupidity of the man.

Pottage and a full belly to-day—that was all he got for such a sacrifice.

'This their way is their folly.'

3. How well the bargain worked at first, and what came of it at last.

No doubt Esau had his meal, and, no doubt, when a man sells his soul to the devil (the mediæval form of the story), he generally gets the price for which he bargained, more or less, and oftentimes with a dash of vinegar in the porridge, which makes it less palatable.

What comes of it at last. Put side by side the pictures of Esau's animal contentment at the moment when he had eaten up his mess, and of his despair when he wailed, 'Hast thou not one blessing?'

He finds out his mistake. A sense of the preciousness of the despised thing wakes in him.

And it is too late. There *are* irrevocable consequences of every false choice. Youth is gone: cannot alter that. Opportunities gone: cannot alter that. Strength gone: cannot alter that. Habits formed, associations, reputation, position, character, are all determined.

But there is a blessed *contrast* between Esau's experience and what may be ours. The desire to have the birthright is sure to bring it to us. No matter how late the desire is of springing, nor how long and insultingly we have suppressed it, we never go to our Father in vain with the cry, 'Bless me, even me also.'

'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?'

THE FIRST APOSTLE OF PEACE AT ANY PRICE

'Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold, and the Lord blessed him. And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great: For he had possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants: and the Philistines envied him. For all the wells which his father's servants had digged in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped them, and filled them with earth. And Abimelech said unto Isaac, Go from us; for thou art much mightier than we. And Isaac departed thence, and pitched his tent in the valley of Gerar, and dwelt there. And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham: and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them. And Isaac's servants digged in the valley, and found there a well of springing water. And the herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdmen, saying, The water is our's: and he called the name of the well Esek; because they strove with him. And they digged another well, and strove for that also: and he called the name of it Sitnah. And he removed from thence, and digged

> another well; and for that they strove not: and he called the name of it Rehoboth; and he said, For now the Lord hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land. And he went up from thence to Beer-sheba. And the Lord appeared unto him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake. And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the Lord, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well.'—GENESIS xxvi. 12-25.

THE salient feature of Isaac's life is that it has no salient features. He lived out his hundred and eighty years in quiet, with little to make history. Few details of his story are given, and some of these are not very creditable. He seems never to have wandered far from the neighbourhood of Beersheba. These quiet, rolling stretches of thinly peopled land contented him, and gave pasture for his flocks, as well as fields for his cultivation. Like many of the tribes of that district still, he had passed from the purely nomad and pastoral life, such as Abraham led, and had begun to 'sow in that land.' That marks a stage in progress. His father's life had been like a midsummer day, with bursts of splendour and heavy thunder-clouds; his was liker a calm day in autumn, windless and unchanging from morning till serene evening. The world thinks little of such lives, but they are fruitful.

Our text begins with a sweet little picture of peaceful industry, blessed by God, and therefore prospering. Travellers tell us that the land where Isaac dwelt is still marvellously fertile, even to rude farming. But to be merely a successful farmer and sheep-owner might have seemed poor work to the heir of such glowing promises, and the prospect of a high destiny often disgusts its possessor with lowly duties. 'But if we hope for that which we see not, then do we with patience wait for it,' and the best way to fit ourselves for great things in the future is to bend our backs and wills to humble toil in the present. Peter expected every day to see the risen Lord, when he said, 'I go a-fishing.'

The Philistines' envy was very natural, since Isaac was an alien, and, in some sense, an intruder. Their stopping of the wells was a common act of hostility, and an effectual one in that land, where everything lives where water comes, and dies if it is cut off. Abimelech's reason for 'extraditing' Isaac might have provoked a more pugnacious person to stay and defy the Philistines to expel him. 'Thou art much mightier than we,' and so he could have said, 'Try to put me out, then,' and the result might have been that Abimelech and his Philistines would have been the ones to go. But the same spirit was in the man as had been in the lad, when he let his father bind him and lay him on the altar without a struggle or a word, and he quietly went, leaving his fields and pastures. 'Very poor-spirited,' says the world; what does Christ say?

Isaac was not 'original.' He cleaned out the wells which his father had digged, and with filial piety gave them again the old names 'which his father had called them.' Some of us nowadays get credit for being 'advanced and liberal thinkers,' because we regard our fathers' wells as much too choked with rubbish to be worth clearing out, and the last thing we should dream of would be to revive the old names. But the old wells were not enough for the new time, and so fresh ones were added. Isaac and his servants did not say, 'We will have no water but what is drawn from Abraham's wells. What was enough for him is enough for us.' So, like all wise men, they were conservatively progressive and progressively conservative. The Gerar shepherds were sharp lawyers. They took strong ground in saying, 'The *water* is ours; you have dug wells, but we are ground-owners, and what is below the surface, as well as what is on it, is our property.' Again Isaac yielded, moved on a little way, and tried again. A second well was claimed, and given up, and all that Isaac did was to name the two 'Contention' and 'Enmity,' as a gentle rebuke and memorial. Then, as is generally the result, gentleness wearied violence out, and the Philistines tired of annoying before Isaac tired of yielding. So he came into a quiet harbour at last, and traced his repose to God, naming his last well 'Broad Places,' because the Lord had made room for him.

Such a quiet spirit, strong in non-resistance, and ready to yield rather than quarrel, was strangely out of place in these wild days and lands. He obeyed the Sermon on the Mount millenniums before it was spoken. Whether from temperament or from faith, he is the first instance of the Christian type of excellence in the Old Testament. For there ought to be no question that the spirit of meekness, which will not meet violence by violence, is the Christian spirit. Christian morals alter the perspective of moral excellences, and exalt meekness above the 'heroic virtues' admired by the world. The violets and lilies in Christ's garden outshine voluptuous roses and flaunting sunflowers. In this day, when there is a recrudescence of militarism, and we are tempted to canonise the soldier, we need more than ever to insist that the highest type is 'the Lamb of God,' who was 'as a sheep before her shearers.' To fight for my rights is not the Christian ideal, nor is it the best way to secure them. Isaac will generally weary out the Philistines, and get his well at last, and will have escaped much friction and many evil passions.

'’Tis safer being meek than fierce.'

Isaac won the friendship of his opponents by his patience, as the verses after the text tell. Their consciences and hearts were touched, and they 'saw plainly that the Lord was with him,' and sued him for alliance. It is better to turn enemies into friends than to beat them and have them as enemies still. 'I'll knock you down unless you love me' does not sound a very hopeful way of cementing peaceful relations. But 'when a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.' But Isaac won more than the Philistines' favour by his meek peacefulness, for 'the Lord appeared unto him,' and assured him that, undefended and unresisting as he was, he had a strong defence, and need not be afraid: 'Fear not, for I am with thee.' The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is, in the sight of God, of great price, and that not only for 'a woman'; and it brings visions of God, and assurances of tranquil safety to him who cherishes it. The Spirit of God comes down in the likeness of a dove, and that bird of peace sits 'brooding "only" on the charmed wave' of a heart stilled from strife and wrath, like a quiet summer's sea.

Isaac's new home at Beersheba, having been thus hallowed by the appearance of the Lord, was consecrated by the building of an altar. We should hallow by grateful remembrance the spots where God has made Himself known to us. The best beginning of a new undertaking is to rear an altar. It is well when new settlers begin their work by calling on the name of the Lord. Beersheba and Plymouth Rock are a pair. First comes the altar, then the tent can be trustfully pitched, but 'except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.' And if the house is built in faith, a well will not be lacking; for they who 'seek first the kingdom of God' will have all needful 'things added unto them.'

THE HEAVENLY PATHWAY AND THE EARTHLY HEART

'And Jacob went out from Beer-sheba, and went toward Haran. And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of. And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Beth-el: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first. And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God: And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that Thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto Thee.'—GENESIS xxviii. 10-22.

FROM Abraham to Jacob is a great descent. The former embodies the nobler side of the Jewish character,—its capacity for religious ideas; its elevation above, and separation from, the nations; its consciousness of, and peaceful satisfaction in, a divine Friend; its consequent vocation in the world. These all were deep in the founder of the race, and flowed to it from him. Jacob, on the other hand, has in him the more ignoble qualities, which Christian treatment of the Jew has fostered, and which have become indissolubly attached to the name in popular usage. He is a crafty schemer, selfish, over-reaching, with a keen eye to the main chance. Whoever deals with him has to look sharply after his own interests. Self-advantage in its most earthly form is uppermost in him; and, like all timid, selfish men, shifty ways and evasions are his natural weapons. The great interest of his history lies in the slow process by which the patient God purified him, and out of this 'stone raised up a worthy child to Abraham.' We see in this context the first step in his education, and the very imperfect degree in which he profited by it.

1. Consider the vision and its accompanying promise. Jacob has fled from home on account of his nobler brother's fierce wrath at the trick which their scheming mother and he had contrived. It was an ugly, heartless fraud, a crime against a doting father, as against Esau. Rebekah gets alarmed for her favourite; and her fertile brain hits upon another device to blind Isaac and get Jacob out of harm's way, in the excuse that she cannot bear his marriage with a Hittite woman. Her exaggerated expressions of passionate dislike to 'the daughters of Heth' have no religious basis. They are partly feigned and partly petulance. So the poor old blind father is beguiled once more, and sends his son away. Starting under such auspices, and coming from such an atmosphere, and journeying back to Haran, the hole of the pit whence Abraham had been digged, and turning his back on the land where God had been with his house,

the wanderer was not likely to be cherishing any lofty thoughts. His life was in danger; he was alone, a dim future was before him, perhaps his conscience was not very comfortable. These things would be in his mind as he lay down and gazed into the violet sky so far above him, burning with all its stars. Weary, and with a head full of sordid cares, plans, and possibly fears, he slept; and then there flamed on 'that inward eye, which is the bliss of solitude' to the pure, and its terror to the evil, this vision, which speaks indeed to his then need, as he discerned it, but reveals to him and to us the truth which ennobles all life, burns up the dross of earthward-turned aims, and selfish, crafty ways.

We are to conceive of the form of the vision as a broad stair or sloping ascent, rather than a ladder, reaching right from the sleeper's side to the far-off heaven, its pathway peopled with messengers, and its summit touching the place where a glory shone that paled even the lustrous constellations of that pure sky. Jacob had thought himself alone; the vision peoples the wilderness. He had felt himself defenceless; the vision musters armies for his safety. He had been grovelling on earth, with no thoughts beyond its fleeting goods; the vision lifts his eyes from the low level on which they had been gazing. He had been conscious of but little connection with heaven; the vision shows him a path from his very side right into its depths. He had probably thought that he was leaving the presence of his father's God when he left his father's tent; the vision burns into his astonished heart the consciousness of God as there, in the solitude and the night.

The divine promise is the best commentary on the meaning of the vision. The familiar ancestral promise is repeated to him, and the blessing and the birthright thus confirmed. In addition, special assurances, the translation of the vision into word and adapted to his then wants, are given, — God's presence in his wanderings, his protection, Jacob's return to the land, and the promise of God's persistent presence, working through all paradoxes of providence and sins of His servant, and incapable of staying its operations, or satisfying God's heart, or vindicating His faithfulness, at any point short of complete accomplishment of His plighted word.

We pass from the lone desert and the mysterious twilight of Genesis to the beaten ways between Galilee and Jordan, and to the clear historic daylight of the gospel, and we hear Christ renewing the promise to the crafty Jacob, to one whom He called a son of Jacob in his after better days, 'an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.' The very heart of Christ's work was unveiled in the terms of this vision: From henceforth 'ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.' So, then, the fleeting vision was a transient revelation of a permanent reality, and a faint foreshadowing of the true communication between heaven and earth. Jesus Christ is the ladder between God and man. On Him all divine gifts descend; by Him all the angels of human devotion, consecration, and aspiration go up. This flat earth is not so far from the topmost heaven as sense thinks. The despairing question of Jewish wisdom, 'Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? . . . What is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?'—which has likewise been the question of every age that has not been altogether sunk in sensual delights—is answered once for all in the incarnate and crucified and ascended Lord, by and in whom all heaven has stooped to earth, that earth might be lifted to heaven. Every child of man, though lonely and earthly, has the ladder-foot by his side,—like the sunbeam, which comes straight into the eyes of every gazer, wherever he stands. It becomes increasingly evident, in the controversies of these days, that there will remain for modern thought only the alternative,—either Jesus Christ is the means of communication between God and man, or there is no communication. Deism and theism are compromises, and cannot live. The cultivated world in both hemispheres is being more and more shut up to either accepting Christ as revealer, by whom alone we know, and as medium by whom alone we love and approach, God; or sinking into abysses of negations where choke-damp will stifle enthusiasm and poetry, as well as devotion and immortal hope.

Jacob's vision was meant to teach him, and is meant to teach us, the nearness of God, and the swift directness of communication, whereby His help comes to us and our desires rise to Him. These and their kindred truths were to be to him, and should be to us, the parents of much nobleness. Here is the secret of elevation of aim and thought above the mean things of sense. We all, and especially the young, in whose veins the blood dances, and to whom life is in all its glory and freshness, are tempted to think of it as all. It does us good to have this vision of the eternal realities blazing in upon us, even if it seems to glare at us, rather than to shine with lambent light. The seen is but a thin veil of the unseen. Earth, which we are too apt to make a workshop, or a mere garden of pleasure, is a Bethel,—a house of God. Everywhere the ladder stands; everywhere the angels go up and down; everywhere the Face looks from the top. Nothing will save life from becoming, sooner or later, trivial, monotonous, and infinitely wearisome, but the continual vision of the present God, and the continual experience of the swift ascent and descent of our aspirations and His blessings.

It is the secret of purity too. How could Jacob indulge in his craft, and foul his conscience with sin, as long as he carried the memory of what he had seen in the solitary night on the uplands of Bethel? The direct result of the vision is the same command as Abraham received, 'Walk before Me, and be thou perfect.' Realise My presence, and let that kill the motions of sin, and quicken to service.

It is also the secret of peace. Hopes and fears, and dim uncertainty of the future, no doubt agitated the sleeper's mind as he laid him down. His independent life was beginning. He had just left his father's tents for the first time; and, though not a youth in years, he was in the position which youth holds with us. So to him, and to all young persons, here is shown the charm which will keep the heart calm, and preserve us from being 'over exquisite to cast the fashion of uncertain evils,' or too eagerly longing for possible good. 'I am with thee' should be enough to steady our souls; and the confidence that God will not leave us till He has accomplished His own purpose for us, should make us willing to let Him do as He will with ours.

2. Notice the imperfect reception of the divine teaching. Jacob's startled exclamation on awakening

from his dream indicates a very low level both of religious knowledge and feeling. Nor is there any reason for taking the words in any but their most natural sense; for it is a mistake to ascribe to him the knowledge of God due to later revelation, or, at this stage of his life, any depth of religious emotion. He is alarmed at the thought that God is near. Probably he had been accustomed to think of God's presence as in some special way associated with his father's encampment, and had not risen to the belief of His omnipresence. There seems no joyous leaping up of his heart at the thought that God is here. Dread, not unmingled with the superstitious fear that he had profaned a holy place by laying himself down in it, is his prevailing feeling, and he pleads ignorance as the excuse for his sacrilege. He does not draw the conclusion from the vision that all the earth is hallowed by a near God, but only that he has unwittingly stumbled on His house; and he does not learn that from every place there is an open door for the loving heart into the calm depths where God is throned, but only that *here* he unwittingly stands at the gate of heaven. So he misses the very inner purpose of the vision, and rather shrinks from it than welcomes it. Was that spasm of fear all that passed through his mind that night? Did he sleep again when the glory died out of the heaven? So the story would appear to suggest. But, in any case, we see here the effect of the sudden blazing in upon a heart not yet familiar with the Divine Friend, of the conviction that He is really near. Gracious as God's promise was, it did not dissipate the creeping awe at His presence. It is an eloquent testimony of man's consciousness of sin, that whensoever a present

God becomes a reality to a worldly man, he trembles. 'This place' would not be 'dreadful,' but blessed, if it were not for the sense of discord between God and me.

The morning light brought other thoughts, when it filled the silent heavens, and where the ladder had stretched, there was but empty blue. The lesson is sinking into his mind. He lifts the rude stone and pours oil on it, as a symbol of consecration, as nameless races have done all over the world. His vow shows that he had but begun to learn in God's school. He hedges about his promise with a punctilious repetition of God's undertaking, as if resolved that there should be no mistake. Clause by clause he goes over it all, and puts an 'if' to it. God's word should have kindled something liker faith than that. What a fall from 'Abram believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness'! Jacob barely believed, and will wait to see whether all will turn out as it has been promised. That is not the glad, swift response of a loving, trusting heart. Nor is he contented with repeating to God the terms of his engagement, but he adds a couple of clauses which strike him as being important, and as having been omitted. There was nothing about 'bread to eat, and raiment to put on,' nor about coming back again 'in peace,' so he adds these. A true 'Jew,'—great at a bargain, and determined to get all he can, and to have no mistake about what he must get before he gives anything! Was Jesus thinking at all of the ancestor when He warned the descendants, in words which sound curiously like an echo of Jacob's, not to be anxious 'what ye shall eat,' nor 'what ye shall put on'? As the vow stands in the Authorised Version, it is farther open to the charge of suspending his worship of God upon the fulfilment of these conditions; but it is better to adopt the marginal rendering of the Revised Version, according to which the clause 'then shall the Lord be my God' is a part of the conditions, not of the vow, and is to be read 'And [if] the Lord will be . . . then this stone . . . shall be,' etc. If this rendering be adopted, as I think it should be, the vow proper is simply of outward service,—he will rear an altar, and he will tithe his substance. Not a very munificent pledge! And where in it is the surrender of the heart? Where is the outgoing of love and gratitude? Where the clasping of the hand of his heavenly Friend with calm rapture of thankful self-yielding, and steadfastness of implicit trust? God did not want Jacob's altar, nor his tenths; He wanted Jacob. But many a weary year and many a sore sorrow have to leave their marks on him before the evil strain is pressed out of his blood; and by the unwearied long-suffering of his patient Friend and Teacher in heaven, the crafty, earthly-minded Jacob 'the supplanter' is turned into 'Israel, the prince with God, in whom is no guile.' The slower the scholar, the more wonderful the forbearance of the Teacher; and the more may we, who are slow scholars too, take heart to believe that He will not be soon angry with us, nor leave us until He has done that which He has spoken to us of.

MAHANAIM: THE TWO CAMPS

And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim' (*i.e.* Two camps).—GENESIS xxxii. 1, 2.

THIS vision came at a crisis in Jacob's life. He has just left the house of Laban, his father-in-law, where he had lived for many years, and in company with a long caravan, consisting of wives, children, servants, and all his wealth turned into cattle, is journeying back again to Palestine. His road leads him close by the country of Esau. Jacob was no soldier, and he is naturally terrified to meet his justly incensed brother. And so, as he plods along with his defenceless company trailing behind him, as you may see the Arab caravans streaming over the same uplands to-day, all at once, in the middle of his march, a bright-harnessed army of angels meets him. Whether visible to the eye of sense, or, as would appear, only to the eye of faith, they *are* visible to this troubled man; and, in a glow of confident joy, he calls the name of that place 'Mahanaim,' two camps. One camp was the little one of his down here, with the helpless women and children and his own frightened and defenceless self, and the other was the great one up there, or rather in shadowy but most real spiritual presence around about him, as a bodyguard making an impregnable wall between him and every foe. We may take some very plain and everlastingly true lessons out of this story.

1. First, the angels of God meet us on the dusty road of common life. 'Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him.'

As he was tramping along there, over the lonely fields of Edom, with many a thought on his mind and many a fear at his heart, but feeling 'There is the path that I have to walk on,' all at once the air was filled with the soft rustle of angel wings, and the brightness from the flashing armour of the heavenly hosts flamed across his unexpecting eye. And so si it evermore. The true place for us to receive visions of

God is in the path of the homely, prosaic duties which He lays upon us. The dusty road is far more likely to be trodden by angel feet than the remote summits of the mountain, where we sometimes would fain go; and many an hour consecrated to devotion has less of the manifest presence of God than is granted to some weary heart in its commonplace struggle with the little troubles and trials of daily life. These make the doors, as it were, by which the visitants draw near to us.

It is the common duties, 'the narrow round, the daily task,' that not only give us 'all we ought to ask,' but are the selected means and channels by which, ever, God's visitants draw near to us. The man that has never seen an angel standing beside him, and driving his loom for him, or helping him at his counter and his desk, and the woman that has never seen an angel, according to the bold realism and homely vision of the old German picture, working with her in the kitchen and preparing the meal for the household, have little chance of meeting such visitants at any other point of their experience or event of their lives.

If the week be empty of the angels, you will never catch sight of a feather of their wings on the Sunday. And if we do not recognise their presence in the midst of all the prose, and the commonplace, and the vulgarity, and the triviality, and the monotony, the dust of the small duties, we shall go up to the summit of Sinai itself and see nothing there but cold grey stone and everlasting snows. 'Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him.' The true field for religion is the field of common life.

And then another side of the same thought is this, that it is in the path where God has bade us walk that we shall find the angels round us. We may meet them, indeed, on paths of our own choosing, but it will be the sort of angel that Balaam met, with a sword in his hand, mighty and beautiful, but wrathful too; and we had better not front him! But the friendly helpers, the emissaries of God's love, the apostles of His grace, do not haunt the roads that we make for ourselves. They confine themselves rigidly to 'the paths in which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.' A man has no right to expect, and he will not get, blessing and help and divine gifts when, self-willedly, he has taken the bit between his teeth, and is choosing his own road in the world. But if he will say, 'Lord! here I am; put me where Thou wilt, and do with me what Thou wilt,' then he may be sure that that path, though it may be solitary of human companionship, and leading up amongst barren rocks and over bare moorlands, where the sun beats down fiercely, will not be unvisited by a better presence, so that in sweet consciousness of sufficiency of rich grace, he will be able to say, 'I, being in the way, the Lord met me.'

2. Still further, we may draw from this incident the lesson that God's angels meet us punctually at the hour of need.

Jacob is drawing nearer and nearer to his fear every step. He is now just on the borders of Esau's country, and close upon opening communications with his brother. At that critical moment, just before the finger of the clock has reached the point on the dial at which the bell would strike, the needed help comes, the angel guards draw near and camp beside him. It is always so. 'The Lord shall help her, and that right early.' His hosts come no sooner and no later than we need. If they appeared before we had realised our danger and our defencelessness, our hearts would not leap up at their coming, as men in a beleaguered town do when the guns of the relieving force are heard booming from afar. Often God's delays seem to us inexplicable, and our prayers to have no more effect than if they were spoken to a sleeping Baal. But such delays are merciful. They help us to the consciousness of our need. They let us feel the presence of the sorrow. They give opportunity of proving the weakness of all other supports. They test and increase desire for His help. They throw us more unreservedly into His arms. They afford room for the sorrow or the burden to work its peaceable fruits. So, and in many other ways, delay of succour fits us to receive succour, and our God makes no tarrying but for our sakes.

It is His way to let us come almost to the edge of the precipice, and then, in the very nick of time, when another minute and we are over, to stretch out His strong right hand and save us. So Peter is left in prison, though prayer is going up unceasingly for him —and no answer comes. The days of the Passover feast slip away, and still he is in prison, and prayer does nothing for him. The last day of his life, according to Herod's purpose, dawns, and all the day the Church lifts up its voice—but apparently there is no answer, nor any that regarded. The night comes, and still the vain cry goes up, and Heaven seems deaf or apathetic. The night wears on, and still no help comes. But in the last watch of that last night, when day is almost dawning, at nearly the last minute when escape would have been possible, the angel touches the sleeping Apostle, and with leisurely calmness, as sure that he had ample time, leads him out to freedom and safety. It was precisely because Jesus loved the household at Bethany that, after receiving the sisters' message, He abode still for two days in the same place where He was. However our impatience may wonder, and our faithlessness venture sometimes almost to rebuke Him when He comes, with words like Mary's and Martha's—'Lord, if Thou hadst been here, such and such sorrows would not have happened, and Thou couldst so easily have been here'—we should learn the lesson that even if He has delayed so long that the dreaded blow has fallen, He has come soon enough to make it the occasion for a still more glorious communication of His power. 'Rest in the Lord, wait patiently for Him, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.'

3. Again, we learn from this incident that the angels of God come in the shape which we need.

Jacob's want at the moment was protection. Therefore the angels appear in warlike guise, and present before the defenceless man another camp, in which he and his unwieldy caravan of women and children and cattle may find security. If his special want had been of some blessing of another kind, no doubt another form of appearance, suited with precision to his need, would have been imposed upon these angel helpers. For God's gifts to us change their character; as the Rabbis fabled that the manna tasted to each man what each most desired. The same pure heavenly bread has the varying savour that commends it to varying palates. God's grace is Protean. It takes all the forms that man's necessities require. As water assumes the shape of any vessel into which it is put, so this great blessing comes to each of us, moulded according to the pressure and taking the form of our circumstances and necessities. His fulness is all-sufficient. It is the same blood that, passing to all the members, ministers to each according to the needs and fashion of each. And it is the same grace which, passing to our souls, in each man is shaped according to his present condition and ministers to his present wants.

So, dear brethren, in that great fulness each of us may have the thing that we need. The angel who to one man is protection, to another shall be teaching and inspiration; to another shall appear with chariots of fire and horses of fire to sweep the rapt soul heavenward; to another shall draw near as a deliverer from his fetters, at whose touch the bonds shall fall from off him; to another shall appear as the instructor in duty and the appointer of a path of service, like that vision that shone in the castle to the Apostle Paul, and said, 'Thou must bear witness for me at Rome'; to another shall appear as opening the door of heaven and letting a flood of light come down upon his darkened heart, as to the Apocalyptic seer in his rocky Patmos. And 'all this worketh that one and the self-same' Lord of angels 'dividing to every man severally as He will,' and as the man needs. The defenceless Jacob has the manifestation of the divine presence in the guise of armed warriors that guard his unwarlike camp.

I add one last word. Long centuries after Jacob's experience at Mahanaim, another trembling fugitive found himself there, fearful, like Jacob, of the vengeance and anger of one who was knit to him by blood. When poor King David was flying from the face of Absalom his son, the first place where he made a stand, and where he remained during the whole of the rebellion, was this town of Mahanaim, away on the eastern side of the Jordan. Do you not think that to the kingly exile, in his feebleness and his fear, the very name of his resting-place would be an omen? Would he not recall the old story, and bethink himself of how round that other frightened man

> 'Bright-harnessed angels stood in order serviceable';

and would he not, as he looked on his little band of friends, faithful among the faithless, have his eyesight cleared to behold the other camp? Such a vision, no doubt, inspired the calm confidence of the psalm which evidently belongs to that dark hour of his life, and made it possible for the hunted king, with his feeble band, to sing even then, 'I will both lay me down in peace and sleep, for Thou, Lord, makest me dwell in safety, solitary though I am.'

Nor is the vision emptied of its power to stay and make brave by all the ages that have passed. The vision was for a moment; the fact is for ever. The sun's ray was flashed back from celestial armour, 'the next all unreflected shone' on the lonely wastes of the desert—but the host of God was there still. The transitory appearance of the permanent realities is a revelation to us as truly as to the patriarch; and though no angel wings may winnow the air around our road, nor any sworded seraphim be seen on our commonplace march, we too have all the armies of heaven with us, if we tread the path which God has marked out, and in our weakness and trembling commit ourselves to Him. The heavenly warriors die not. and hover around us to-day, excelling in the strength of their immortal youth, and as ready to succour us as they were all these centuries ago to guard the solitary Jacob.

Better still, the 'Captain of the Lord's host' is 'come up' to be our defence, and our faith has not only to behold the many ministering spirits sent forth to minister to us, but One mightier than they, whose commands they all obey, and who Himself is the companion of our solitude and the shield of our defencelessness. It was blessed that Jacob should be met by the many angels of God. It is infinitely more blessed that '*the* Angel of the Lord'—the One who is more than the many—'encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them.'

The postscript of the last letter which Gordon sent from Khartoum closed with the words, 'The hosts are with me—Mahanaim.' Were they not, even though death was near? Was that sublime faith a mistake—the vision an optical delusion? No, for their ranks are arrayed around God's children to keep them from all evil while He wills that they should live, and their chariots of fire and horses of fire are sent to bear them to heaven when He wills that they should die.

THE TWOFOLD WRESTLE—GOD'S WITH JACOB AND JACOB'S WITH GOD

'And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast shewed unto Thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands. Deliver me I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children. And Thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'—GENESIS xxxii. 9-12.

JACOB's subtlety and craft were, as is often the case, the weapons of a timid as well as selfish nature. No wonder, then, that the prospect of meeting his wronged and strong brother threw him into a panic, notwithstanding the vision of the camp of angels by the side of his defenceless caravan of women and children. Esau had received his abject message of propitiation in grim silence, sent no welcome back, but with ominous haste and ambiguous purpose began his march towards him with a strong force. A few hours will decide whether he means revenge. Jacob's fright does not rob him of his ready wit; he goes to work at once to divide his party, so as to ensure safety for half of it. He schemes first, and prays second. The order might have been inverted with advantage, but is like the man—in the lowest phase of his character. His prayer shows that he is beginning to profit by the long years of schooling. Though its burden is only deliverance from Esau, it pleads with God on the grounds of His own command and promise, of Jacob's unworthiness of God's past mercies, and of His firm covenant. A breath of a higher life is stirring in the shifty schemer who has all his life been living by his wits. Now he has come to a point where he knows that his own power can do nothing. With Laban, a man of craft like himself, it was diamond cut diamond; and Jacob was equal to the position. But the wild Bedouin brother, with his four hundred men, is not to be managed so; and Jacob is driven to God by his conscious helplessness. It is the germ, but only the germ, and needs much tending and growth before it matures. The process by which this faint dawning of a better life is broadened into day is begun in the mysterious struggle which forms the main part of this lesson, and is God's answer to his prayer.

1. We have, first, the twofold wrestling. The silent night-long wrestle with the 'traveller unknown' is generally regarded as meaning essentially the same thing as the wonderful colloquy which follows. But I venture to take a somewhat different point of view, and to suggest that there are here two well-marked stages. In the first, which is represented as transacted in unbroken silence, 'a man' wrestles with Jacob, and does not prevail; in the second, which is represented as an interchange of speech, Jacob strives with the 'man,' and does prevail. Taken together, the two are a complete mirror, not only of the manner of the transformation of Jacob into Israel, but of universal eternal truths as to God's dealings with us, and our power with Him.

As to the former stage, the language of the narrative is to be noted, 'There wrestled a man with him.' The attack, so to speak, begins with his mysterious antagonist, not with the patriarch. The 'man' seeks to overcome Jacob, not Jacob the man. There, beneath the deep heavens, in the solemn silence of night, which hides earth and reveals heaven, that strange struggle with an unknown Presence is carried on. We have no material for pronouncing on the manner of it, whether ecstasy, vision, or an objective and bodily fact. The body was implicated in the consequences, at all events, and the impression which the story leaves is of an outward struggle. But the purpose of the incident is the same, however the question as to its form be answered. Nor can we pronounce, as some have done, on the other question, of the personality of the silent wrestler. Angel, or 'the angel of the covenant,' who is a transient, and possibly only apparent. manifestation in human form of Him who afterwards became flesh and dwelt among us, or some other supernatural embodiment, for that one purpose, of the divine presence,—any of these hypotheses is consistent with the intentionally reticent text. What it leaves unspoken, we shall wisely leave undetermined. God acts and speaks through 'the man.' That is all we can know or need.

What, then, was the meaning of this struggle? Was it not a revelation to Jacob of what God had been doing with him all his life, and was still doing? Was not that merciful striving of God with him the inmost meaning of all that had befallen him since the far-off day when he had left his father's tents, and had seen the opened heavens, and the ladder, which he had so often forgotten? Were not his disappointments, his successes, and all the swift changes of life, God's attempts to lead him to yield himself up, and bow his will? And was not God striving with him now, in the anxieties which gnawed at his heart, and in his dread of the morrow? Was He not trying to teach him how crime always comes home to roost, with a brood of pains running behind it? Was not the weird duel in the brooding stillness a disclosure, which would more and more possess his soul as the night passed on, of a Presence which in silence strove with him, and only desired to overcome that He might bless? The conception of a Divine manifestation wrestling all night long with a man has been declared 'crude,' 'puerile,' and I know not how many other disparaging adjectives have been applied to it. But is it more unworthy of Him, or derogatory to His nature, than the lifelong pleading and striving with each of us, which He undoubtedly carries on? The idea of a man contending with God has been similarly stigmatised: but is it more mysterious than that awful power which the human will does possess of setting at naught His counsels and resisting His merciful strivings?

The close of the first stage of the twofold wrestle is marked by the laming of Jacob. The paradox that He, who could not overcome, could yet lame by a touch, is part of the lesson. If His finger could do that, what would the grip of His hand do, if He chose to put out His power? It is not for want of strength that He has not crushed the antagonist, as Jacob would feel, with deepening wonder and awe. What a new light would be thus thrown on all the previous struggle! It was the striving of a power which cared not for a mere outward victory, nor put forth its whole force, lest it should crush him whom it desired to conquer only by his own yielding. As Job says, 'Will He plead against me with His great power?' No; God mercifully restrains His hand, in His merciful striving with men. Desiring to overcome them, He desires not to do so by mere superior power, but by their willing yielding to Him.

That laming of Jacob's thigh represents the weakening of all the life of nature and self which had hitherto been his. He had trusted to his own cunning and quick-wittedness; he had been shrewd, not over-scrupulous, and successful. But he had to learn that 'by strength shall no man prevail,' and to forsake his former weapons. Wrestling with his hands and limbs is not the way to prevail either with God or man. Fighting with God in his own strength, he is only able to thwart God's merciful purpose towards him, but is powerless as a reed in a giant's grasp if God chooses to summon His destructive powers into exercise. So this failure of natural power is the turning-point in the twofold wrestle, and marks as well as symbolises the transition in Jacob's life and character from reliance upon self and craft to reliance upon his divine Antagonist become his Friend. It is the path by which we must all travel if we are to become princes with God. The life of nature and of dependence on self must be broken and lamed in order that, in the very moment of discovered impotence, we may grasp the hand that smites, and find immortal power flowing into our weakness from it.

2. So we come to the second stage, in which Jacob strives with God and does prevail. 'Let me go, for the day breaketh.' Then did the stranger wish to go; and if he did, why could not he, who had lamed his antagonist, loose himself from his grasp? The same explanation applies here which is required in reference to Christ's action to the two disciples at Emmaus: 'He made as though He would have gone further.' In like manner, when He came to them on the water, He appeared as though He 'would have passed by.' In all three cases the principle is the same. God desires to go, if we do not desire Him to stay. He will go, unless we keep Him. Then, at last, Jacob betakes himself to his true weapons. Then, at last, he strangely wishes to keep his apparent foe. He has learned, in some dim fashion, whom he has been resisting, and the blessedness of having Him for friend and companion. So here comes in the account of the whole scene which Hosea gives (Hos. xii. 4): 'He wept, and made supplication unto Him.' That does not describe the earlier portion, but is the true rendering of the later stage, of which our narrative gives a more summary account. The desire to retain God binds

Him to us. All His struggling with us has been aimed at evoking it, and all His fulness responds to it when evoked. Prayer is power. It conquers God. We overcome Him when we yield. When we are vanquished, we are victors. When the life of nature is broken within us, then from conscious weakness springs the longing which God cannot but satisfy. 'When I am weak, then am I strong.' As Charles Wesley puts it, in his grand hymn on this incident:—

> 'Yield to me now, for I am weak,
> But confident in self-despair.'

And God prevails when we prevail. His aim in all the process of His mercy has been but to overcome our heavy earthliness and selfishness, which resists His pleading love. His victory is our yielding, and, in that yielding, obtaining power with Him. He delights to be held by the hand of faith, and ever gladly yields to the heart's cry, 'Abide with me.' 'I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me,' is music to His ear; and our saying so, in earnest, persistent clinging to Him, is His victory as well as ours.

3. We have, next, the new name, which is the prize of Jacob's victory, and the sign of a transformation in his character. Before this time he had been Jacob, the worker with wiles, who supplanted his brother, and met his foes with duplicity and astuteness like their own. He had been mainly of the earth, earthy. But that solemn hour had led him into the presence-chamber, the old craft had been mortally wounded, he had seen some glimpse of God as his friend, whose presence was not 'awful,' as he had thought it long ago, nor enigmatical and threatening, as he had at first deemed it that night, but the fountain

of blessing and the one thing needful. A man who has once learned that lesson, though imperfectly, has passed into a purer region, and left behind him his old crookedness. He has learned to pray, not as before, prayers for mere deliverance from Esau and the like, but his whole being has gone out in yearning for the continual nearness of his mysterious antagonist-friend. So, though still the old nature remains, its power is broken, and he is a new creature. Therefore he needs a new name, and gets it from Him who can name men, because He sees the heart's depths, and because He has the right over them. To impose a name is the sign of authority, possession, insight into character. The change of name indicates a new epoch in a life, or a transformation of the inner man. The meaning of 'Israel' is 'He (who) strives with God'; and the reason for its being conferred is more accurately given by the Revised Version, which translates, 'For thou hast striven with God and with men,' than in the Authorised rendering. His victory with God involved the certainty of his power with men. All his life he had been trying to get the advantage of them, and to conquer them, not by spear and sword, but by his brains. But now the true way to true sway among men is opened to him. All men are the servants of the servant and the friend of God. He who has the ear of the emperor is master of many men.

Jacob is not always called Israel in his subsequent history. His new name was a name of character and of spiritual standing, and that might fluctuate, and the old self resume its power; so he is still called by the former appellation, just as, at certain points in his life, the apostle forfeits the right to be 'Peter,' and has to hear from Christ's lips the old name, the use of which is more poignant than many reproachful words: 'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you.' But in the last death-bed scene, when the patriarch lifted himself in his bed, and with prophetic dignity pronounced his parting benediction on Joseph's sons, the new name reappears with solemn pathos.

That name was transmitted to his descendants, and has passed over to the company of believing men, who have been overcome by God, and have prevailed with God. It is a charter and a promise. It is a stringent reminder of duty and a lofty ideal. A true Christian is an 'Israel.' His office is to wrestle with God. Nor can we forget how this mysterious scene was repeated in yet more solemn fashion, beneath the gnarled olives of Gethsemane, glistening in the light of the paschal full moon, when the true Israel prayed with such sore crying and tears that His body partook of the struggle, and 'His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.' The word which describes Christ's agony is that which is often rendered 'wrestling,' and perhaps is selected with intentional allusion to this incident. At all events, when we think of Jacob by the brook Jabbok, and of a 'greater than our father Jacob' by the brook Kedron, we may well learn what persistence, what earnestness and effort of the whole nature, go to make up the ideal of prayer, and may well blush for the miserable indifference and torpor of what we venture to call our prayers. These are our patterns, 'as many as walk according to this rule,' and are thereby shown to be 'the Israel of God,'—upon them shall be peace.

4. We have, as the end of all, a deepened desire after closer knowledge of God, and the answer to it. Some

expositors (as, for instance, Robertson of Brighton, in his impressive sermon on this section) take the closing petition, 'Tell me, I pray thee, Thy name,' as if it were the centre point of the whole incident. But this is obviously a partial view. The desire to know that name does not come to Jacob, as we might have expected, when he was struggling with his unknown foe in the dark there. It is the end, and, in some sense, the issue, of all that has gone before. Not that he was in any doubt as to the person to whom he spoke; it is just because he knows that he is speaking with God, who alone can bless, that he longs to have some deeper, clearer knowledge still of Him. He is not asking for a word by which he may call Him; the name is the expression of the nature, and his parting request is for something far more intimate and deep than syllables which could be spoken by any lips. The certain sequel of the discovery of God as striving in mercy with a man, and of yielding to him, is the thirst for deeper acquaintance with Him, and for a fuller, more satisfying knowledge of His inmost heart. If the season of mysterious intercourse must cease, and day hide more than it discloses, and Jacob go to face Esau, and we come down from the mount to sordid cares and mean tasks, at least we long to bear with us as a love-token some whisper in our inmost hearts that may cheer us with the peaceful truth about Him and be a hidden sweetness. The presence of such a desire is a sure consequence, and therefore a good test, of real prayer.

The Divine answer, which sounds at first like refusal, is anything but that. Why dost thou ask after My name? surely I need not to give thee more revelation of My character. Thou hast enough of light; what thou needest is insight into what thou hast already. We have in what God has made known of Himself already to us—both in His outward revelation, which is so much larger and sweeter to us than it was to Jacob, but also in His providences, and in the inward communion which we have with Him if we have let Him overcome us, and have gained power to prevail with Him—sources of certain knowledge of Him so abundant and precious that we need nothing but the loving eye which shall take in all their beauty and completeness, to have our most eager desires after His name more than satisfied. We need not ask for more sunshine, but take care to spread ourselves out in the full sunshine which we have, and let it drench our eyes and fire our hearts. 'And He blessed him there.' Not till now was he capable of receiving the full blessing. He needed to have self beaten out of him; he needed to recognise God as lovingly striving with Him; he needed to yield himself up to Him; he needed to have his heart thus cleansed and softened, and then opened wide by panting desire for the presence and benediction of God; he needed to be made conscious of his new standing, and of the higher life budding within him; he needed to experience the yearning for a closer vision of the face, a deeper knowledge of the name,—and then it was possible to pour into his heart a tenderness and fulness of blessing which before there had been no room to receive, and which now answered in sweetest fashion the else unanswered desire, 'Tell me, I pray thee, Thy name.'

In like manner we may each be blessed with the presence and benediction of Him whose merciful strivings, when we knew Him not, came to us in the darkness; and to whom, if we yield, there will be peace and power in our hearts, and upon us, too, the sun will rise as we pass from the place where our foe became our friend, and by faith we saw Him face to face, and drank in life by the gaze.

A FORGOTTEN VOW

'Arise, go up to Beth-el, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother.'
GENESIS xxxv. 1.

THIRTY years at least had passed since Jacob's vow; ten or twenty since his return. He is in no haste to fulfil it, but has settled down at Shechem and bought land there, and seems to have forgotten all about Bethel.

1. *The lesson of possible negligence.*

(*a*) We are apt to forget vows when God has fulfilled His side of them. Resolutions made in time of trouble are soon forgotten. We pray and think about God more then than when things go well with us. Religion is in many men's judgment for stormy weather only.

(*b*) We are often more resolved to make sacrifices in the beginning of our Christian course than afterwards.

Many a brilliant morning is followed by cloudy day.

Youth is often full of enthusiasms which after-days forget.

2. *The reasons for the negligence.*

Jacob felt a gradual fading away of impressions of need. He was comfortably settled at Shechem. He was surrounded by a wild, godless household who cherished their idols, and he knew that if he went to Bethel idolatry must be given up.

3. *The essentials to communion and service.*

Surrender. Purity. Must bury idols under oak

4. *The reward of sacrifice and of duty discharged.* The renewed appearance of God. The confirmation of name Israel. Enlarged promises. So the old man's vision may be better than the youth's, if he lives up to his youthful vows.

THE TRIALS AND VISIONS OF DEVOUT YOUTH

'And Jacob dwelt in the land wherein his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan. These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report. Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours. And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him. And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it his brethren: and they hated him yet the more. And he said unto them, Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed: For, behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose, and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance to my sheaf. And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words. And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me. And he told it to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth? And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying.'—GENESIS xxxvii. 1-11.

'THE generations of Jacob' are mainly occupied with the history of Joseph, because through him mainly was the divine purpose carried on. Jacob is now the head of the chosen family, since Isaac's death (Gen. xxxv. 29), and therefore the narrative is continued under that new heading. There may possibly be intended a contrast in 'dwelt' and 'sojourned' in verse 1, the former implying a more complete settling down.

There are two principal points in this narrative,—the sad insight that it gives into the state of the household in which so much of the world's history and hopes was wrapped up, and the preludings of Joseph's future in his dreams.

As to the former, the account of it is introduced by the statement that Joseph, at seventeen years of age, was set to work, according to the wholesome Eastern usage, and so was thrown into the company of the sons of the two slave-women, Bilhah and Zilpah. Delitzsch understands 'lad' in verse 2 in the sense in which we use 'boy,' as meaning an attendant. Joseph was, then, told off to be subordinate to these two sets of his rough brothers. The relationship was enough to rouse hatred in such coarse souls. And, indeed, the history of Jacob's household strikingly illustrates the miserable evils of polygamy, which makes families within the family, and turns brothers into enemies. Bilhah's and Zilpah's sons reflected in their hatred of Rachel's their mothers' envy of the true wife of Jacob's heart. The sons of the bondwoman were sure to hate the sons of the free.

If Joseph had been like his brothers, they would have forgiven him his mother. But he was horrified at his first glimpse of unrestrained young passions, and, in the excitement of disgust and surprise, 'told their evil report.' No doubt, his brothers had been unwilling enough to be embarrassed by his presence, for there is nothing that wild young men dislike more than the constraint put on them by the presence of an innocent youth; and when they found out that this 'milk-sop' of a brother was a spy and a telltale, their wrath blazed up. So Joseph had early experience of the shock which meets all young men who have been brought up in godly households when they come into contact with sin in fellow-clerks, servants, students, or the like. It is a sharp test of what a young man is made of, to come forth from the shelter of a father's care and a mother's love, and to be forced into witnessing and hearing such things as go on wherever a number of young men are thrown together. Be not 'partaker of other men's sins.' And the trial is doubly great when the tempters are elder brothers, and the only way to escape their unkindness is to do as they do. Joseph had an early experience of the need of resistance; and, as long as the world is a world, love to God will mean hatred from its worst elements. If we are 'sons of the day,' we cannot but rebuke the darkness.

It is an invidious office to tell other people's evil-doing, and he who brings evil reports of others generally and deservedly gets one for himself. But there are circumstances in which to do so is plain duty, and only a mistaken sense of honour keeps silence. But there must be no exaggeration, malice, or personal ends in the informer. Classmates in school or college, fellow-servants, employees in great businesses, and the like, have not only a duty of loyalty to one another, but of loyalty to their superior. We are sometimes bound to be blind to, and dumb about, our associates' evil deeds, but sometimes silence makes us accomplices.

Jacob had a right to know, and Joseph would have been wrong if he had not told him, the truth about his brothers. Their hatred shows that his purity had made their doing wrong more difficult. It is a grand thing when a young man's presence deprives the Devil of elbow-room for his tricks. How much restraining influence such a one may exert!

Jacob's somewhat foolish love, and still more foolish way of showing it, made matters worse. There were many excuses for him. He naturally clung to the son of his lost but never-forgotten first love, and as naturally found, in Joseph's freedom from the vices of his other sons, a solace and joy. It has been suggested that the 'long garment with sleeves,' in which he decked the lad, indicated an intention of transferring the rights of the first-born to him, but in any case it meant distinguishing affection; and the father or mother who is weak enough to show partiality in the treatment of children need not wonder if their unwise love creates bitter heart-burnings. Perhaps, if Bilhah's and Zilpah's sons had had a little more sunshine of a father's love, they would have borne brighter flowers and sweeter fruit. It is fatal when a child begins to suspect that a parent is not fair.

So these surly brothers, who could not even say 'Peace be to thee!' (the common salutation) when they came across Joseph, had a good deal to say for themselves. It is a sad picture of the internal feuds of the house from which all nations were to be blessed. The Bible does not idealise its characters, but lets us see the seamy side of the tapestry, that we may the more plainly recognise the Mercy which forgives, and the mighty Providence which works through, such imperfect men. But the great lesson for all young people from the picture of Joseph's early days, when his whiteness rebuked the soiled lives of his brothers, as new-fallen snow the grimy cake, hardened and soiled on the streets, is, 'My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.' Never mind a world's hatred, if you have a father's love. There is one Father who can draw His obedient children into the deepest secrets of His heart without withholding their portion from the most prodigal.

Joseph's dreams are the other principal point in the narrative. The chief incidents of his life turn on dreams,—his own, his fellow-prisoners', Pharaoh's. The narrative recognises them as divinely sent, and no higher form of divine communication appears to have been made to Joseph. He received no new revelations of religious truth. His mission was, not to bring fresh messages from heaven, but to effect the transference of the nation to Egypt. Hence the lower form of the communications made to him.

The meaning of both dreams is the same, but the second goes beyond the first in the grandeur of the emblems, and in the inclusion of the parents in the act of obeisance. Both sets of symbols were drawn from familiar sights. The homeliness of the 'sheaves' is in striking contrast with the grandeur of the 'sun, moon, and stars.' The interpretation of the first is ready to hand, because the sheaves were 'your sheaves' and 'my sheaf.' There was no similar key included in the second, and his brothers do not appear to have caught its meaning. It was Jacob who read it. Probably Rachel was dead when the dream came, but that need not make a difficulty.

Note that Joseph did not tell his dreams with elation, or with a notion that they meant anything particular. It is plainly the singularity of them that makes him repeat them, as is clearly indicated by the repeated 'behold' in his two reports. With perfect innocence of intention, and as he would have told any other strange dream, the lad repeats them. The commentary was the work of his brothers, who were ready to find proofs of his being put above them, and of his wish to humiliate them, in anything he said or did. They were wiser than he was. Perhaps they suspected that Jacob meant to set him at the head of the clan on his decease, and that the dreams were trumped up and told to them to prepare them for the decision which the special costume may have already hinted.

At all events, hatred is very suspicious, and ready to prick up its ears at every syllable that seems to speak of the advancement of its object.

There is a world of contempt, rage, and fear in the questions, 'Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us?' The conviction that Joseph was marked out by God for a high position seems to have entered these rough souls, and to have been fuel to fire. Hatred and envy make a perilous mixture. Any sin can come from a heart drenched with these. Jacob seems to have been wise enough to make light of the dreams to the lad, though much of them in his heart. Youthful visions of coming greatness are often best discouraged. The surest way to secure their fulfilment is to fill the present with strenuous, humble work. 'Do the duty that is nearest thee.' 'The true apprenticeship for a ruler is to serve.' 'Act, act, in the living present.' The sheaves may come to bow down some day, but 'my sheaf' has to be cut and bound first, and the sooner the sickle is among the corn, the better.

But yet, on the other hand, let young hearts be true to their early visions, whether they say much about them or not. Probably it will be wisest to keep silence. But there shine out to many young men and women, at their start in life, bright possibilities of no ignoble sort, and rising higher than personal ambition, which it is the misery and sin of many to see 'fade away into the light of common day,' or into the darkness of night. Be not 'disobedient to the heavenly vision'; for the dreams of youth are often the prophecies of what God means and makes it possible for the dreamer to be, if he wakes to work towards that fair thing which shone on him from afar.

MAN'S PASSIONS AND GOD'S PURPOSE

'And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stript Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colours that was on him; And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it. And they sat down to eat bread: and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmeelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt. And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmeelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh. And his brethren were content. Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt. And Reuben returned unto the pit; and, behold, Joseph was not in the pit; and he rent his clothes. And he returned unto his brethren, and said, The child is not; and I, whither shall I go? And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood; And they sent the coat of many colours, and they brought it to their father; and said, This have we found: know now whether it be thy son's coat or no. And he knew it, and said, It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces. And Jacob rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his loins, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning. Thus his father wept for him. And the Midianites sold him into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's and captain of the guard.'—GENESIS xxxvii. 23-36.

WE have left the serene and lofty atmosphere of communion and saintship far above us. This narrative takes us down into foul depths. It is a hideous story of vulgar hatred and cruelty. God's name is never mentioned in it; and he is as far from the actors' thoughts as from the writer's words. The crime of the brothers is the subject, and the picture is painted in dark tones to teach large truths about sin.

1. The broad teaching of the whole story, which is ever being reiterated in Old Testament incidents, is that God works out His great purposes through even the crimes of unconscious men. There is an irony, if we may so say, in making the hatred of these men the very means of their brother's advancement, and the occasion of blessing to themselves. As coral insects work, not knowing the plan of their reef, still less the fair vegetation and smiling homes

which it will one day carry, but blindly building from the material supplied by the ocean a barrier against it; so even evil-doers are carrying on God's plan, and sin is made to counterwork itself, and be the black channel through which the flashing water of life pours. Joseph's words (Gen. l. 20) give the point of view for the whole story: 'Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good . . . to save much people alive.' We can scarcely forget the still more wonderful example of the same thing, in the crime of crimes, when his brethren slew the Son of God —like Joseph, the victim of envy—and, by their crime, God's counsel of mercy for them and for all was fulfilled.

2. Following the narrative, verses 23, 24, and 25 show us the poisonous fruit of brotherly hatred. The family, not the nation, is the social unit in Genesis. From the beginning, we find the field on which sin works is the family relation. Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, and now the other children of Jacob and Joseph, attest the power of sin when it enters there, and illustrate the principle that the corruption of the best is the worst. The children of Rachel could not but be hated by the children of other mothers. Jacob's undisguised partiality for Joseph was a fault too, which wrought like yeast on the passions of his wild sons. The long-sleeved garment which he gave to the lad probably meant to indicate his purpose to bestow on him the right of the first-born forfeited by Reuben, and so the violent rage which it excited was not altogether baseless. The whole miserable household strife teaches the rottenness of the polygamous relation on which it rested, and the folly of paternal favouritism. So it carries

teaching especially needed then, but not out of date now.

The swift passage of the purely inward sin of jealous envy into the murderous act, as soon as opportunity offered, teaches the short path which connects the inmost passions with the grossest outward deeds. Like Jonah's gourd, the smallest seed of hate needs but an hour or two of favouring weather to become a great tree, with all obscene and blood-seeking birds croaking in its branches. 'Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer.' Therefore the solemn need for guarding the heart from the beginnings of envy, and for walking in love.

The clumsy contrivance for murder without criminality, which Reuben suggested, is an instance of the shallow pretexts with which the sophistry of sin fools men before they have done the wrong thing. Sin's mask is generally dropped very soon after. The bait is useless when the hook is well in the fish's gills. 'Don't let us kill him. Let us put him into a cistern. He cannot climb up its bottle-shaped, smooth sides. But that is not our fault. Nobody will ever hear his muffled cries from its depths. But there will be no blood on our hands.' It was not the first time, nor is it the last, that men have tried to blink their responsibility for the consequences which they hoped would come of their crimes. Such excuses seem sound when we are being tempted; but, as soon as the rush of passion is past, they are found to be worthless. Like some cheap castings, they are only meant to be seen in front, where they are rounded and burnished. Get behind them, and you find them hollow.

'They sat down to eat bread.' Thomas Fuller pithily says: 'With what heart could they say grace, either before or after meat?' What a grim meal! And what an indication of their rude natures, seared consciences, and deadened affections!

This picture of the moral condition of the fathers of the Jewish tribes is surely a strong argument for the historical accuracy of the narrative. It would be strange if the legends of a race, instead of glorifying, should blacken, the characters of its founders. No motive can be alleged which would explain such a picture; its only explanation is its truth. The ugly story, too, throws vivid light on that thought, which prophets ever reiterated, 'not for your sakes, but for My name's sake.' The divine choice of Israel was grounded, not on merit, but on sovereign purpose. And the undisguised plainness of the narrative of their sins is but of a piece with the tone of Scripture throughout. It never palliates the faults even of its best men. It tells its story without comment. It never indulges in condemnation any more than in praise. It is a perfect mirror; its office is to record, not to criticise. Many misconceptions of Old Testament morality would have been avoided by keeping that simple fact in view.

3. The ill-omened meal is interrupted by the sudden appearance, so picturesquely described, of the caravan of Ishmaelites with their loaded camels. Dothan was on or near the great trade route to Egypt, where luxury, and especially the custom of embalming, opened a profitable market for spices. The traders would probably not be particular as to the sort of merchandise they picked up on their road, and such an 'unconsidered trifle' as a slave or two would be neither here nor there. This opportune advent of the caravan sets a thought buzzing in Judah's brain, which brings out

a new phase of the crime. Hatred darkening to murder is bad enough; but hatred which has also an eye to business, and makes a profit out of a brother, is a shade or two blacker, because it means cold-blooded calculation and selfish advantage instead of raging passion. Judah's cynical question avows the real motive of his intervention. He prefers the paltry gain from selling Joseph to the unprofitable luxury of killing him. It brings in regard to brotherly ties at the end, as a kind of homage paid to propriety, as if the obligations they involved were not broken as really by his proposal as by murder. Certainly it is strange logic which can say in one breath, 'Let us sell him; . . . for he is our brother,' and finds the clause between buffer enough to keep these two contradictories from collision.

If any touch of conscience made the brothers prefer the less cruel alternative, one can only see here another illustration of the strange power which men have of limiting the working of conscience, and of the fact that when a greater sin has been resolved on, a smaller one gets to look almost like a virtue. Perhaps Judah and the rest actually thought themselves very kind and brotherly when they put their brother into strangers' power, and so went back to their meal with renewed cheerfulness, both because they had gained their end without bloodshed, and because they had got the money. They did not think that every tear and pang which Joseph would shed and feel would be laid at their door.

We do not suppose that Joseph was meant to be, in the accurate sense of the word, a type of Christ. But the coincidence is not to be passed by, that these same powerful motives of envy and of greed were combined in His case too, and that there again a Judah (Judas) appears as the agent of the perfidy.

We may note that the appearance of the traders in the nick of time, suggesting the sale of Joseph, points the familiar lesson that the opportunity to do ill deeds often makes ill deeds done. The path for entering on evil is made fatally easy at first; that gate always stands wide. The Devil knows how to time his approaches. A weak nature, with an evil bias in it, finds everywhere occasions and suggestions to do wrong. But it is the evil nature which makes innocent things opportunities for evil. Therefore we have to be on our guard, as knowing that if we fall it is not circumstances, but ourselves, that made stumbling-blocks out of what might have been stepping-stones.

4. Leaving Joseph to pursue his sad journey, our narrative introduces for the first time Reuben, whose counsel, as the verses before the text tell us, it had been to cast the poor lad into the cistern. His motive had been altogether good; he wished to save life, and as soon as the others were out of the way, to bring Joseph up again and get him safely back to Jacob. In chapter xlii. 22, Reuben himself reminds his brothers of what had passed. There he says that he had besought them not to 'sin against the child,' which naturally implies that he had wished them to do nothing to him, and that they 'would not hear.' In the verses before the text he proposes the compromise of the pit, and the others 'hear.' So there seem to have been two efforts made by him—first, to shield Joseph from any harm, and then that half-and-half measure which was adopted. He is absent, while they carry out the plan, and from the cruel merriment of

the feast—perhaps watching his opportunity to rescue, perhaps in sickness of heart and protest against the deed. Well meant and kindly motived as his action was—and self-sacrificing too, if, as is probable, Joseph was meant by Jacob as his successor in the forfeited birthright—his scheme breaks down, as attempts to mitigate evil by compliance and to make compromises with sinners usually do. The only one of the whole family who had some virtue in him, was too timid to take up a position of uncompromising condemnation. He thought it more polite to go part of the way, and to trust to being able to prevent the worst. That is always a dangerous experiment. It is often tried still; it never answers. Let a man stand to his guns, and speak out the condemnation that is in his heart; otherwise, he will be sure to go farther than he meant, he will lose all right of remonstrance, and will generally find that the more daring sinners have made his well-meant schemes to avert the mischief impossible.

5. The cruel trick by which Jacob was deceived is perhaps the most heartless bit of the whole heartless crime. It came as near an insult as possible. It was maliciously meant. The snarl about the coat, the studied use of 'thy son,' as if the brothers disowned the brotherhood, the unfeeling harshness of choosing such a way of telling their lie—all were meant to give the maximum of pain, and betray their savage hatred of father and son, and its causes. Was Reuben's mouth shut all this time? Evidently. From his language in chapter xlii., 'His blood is required,' he seems to have believed until then that Joseph had been killed in his absence. But he dared not speak. Had he told what he did know, the brothers had but to add, 'And he proposed it himself,' and his protestations of his good

intentions would have been unheeded. He believed his brother dead, and perhaps thought it better that Jacob should think him slain by wild beasts than by brothers' hands, as Reuben supposed him to be. But his shut mouth teaches again how dangerous his policy had been, and how the only road, which it is safe, in view of the uncertainties of the future, to take, is the plain road of resistance to evil and non-fellowship with its doers.

6. And what of the poor old father? His grief is unworthy of God's wrestler. It is not the part of a devout believer in God's providence to refuse to be comforted. There was no religious submission in his passionate sorrow. How unlike the quiet resignation which should have marked the recognition that the God who had been his guide was working here too! No doubt the hypocritical condolences of his children were as vinegar upon nitre. No doubt the loss of Joseph had taken away the one gentle and true son on whom his loneliness rested since his Rachel's death, while he found no solace in the wild, passionate men who called him 'father,' and brought him no 'honour.' But still his grief is beyond the measure which a true faith in God would have warranted; and we cannot but see that the dark picture which we have just been looking at gets no lighter or brighter tints from the demeanour of Jacob.

There are few bitterer sorrows than for a parent to see the children of his own sin in the sins of his children. Jacob might have felt that bitterness, as he looked round on the lovelessness and dark, passionate selfishness of his children, and remembered his own early crimes against Esau. He might have seen that his unwise fondness for the son of his Rachel had led to the brothers' hatred, though he did not know that that hatred had plunged the arrow into his soul. Whether he knew it or not, his own conduct had feathered the arrow. He was drinking as he had brewed; and the heart-broken grief which darkened his later years had sprung from seed of his own sowing. So it is always. 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.'

It is a miserable story of ignoble jealousy and cruel hate; and yet, over all this foaming torrent, God's steadfast bow of peace shines. These crimes and this 'affliction of Joseph' were the direct path to the fulfilment of His purposes. As blind instruments, even in their rebellion and sin, men work out His designs. The lesson of Joseph's bondage will one day be the summing up of the world's history. 'Thou makest the wrath of man to praise Thee: and with the remainder thereof Thou girdest Thyself.'

GOODNESS IN A DUNGEON

And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison. But the Lord was with Joseph, and shewed him mercy, and gave him favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison. And the keeper of the prison committed to Joseph's hand all the prisoners that were in the prison; and whatsoever they did there, he was the doer of it. The keeper of the prison looked not to any thing that was under his hand; because the Lord was with him, and that which he did, the Lord made it to prosper.'—GENESIS xxxix. 20-23.

'And it came to pass after these things, that the butler of the king of Egypt and his baker had offended their lord the king of Egypt. And Pharaoh was wroth against two of his officers, against the chief of the butlers, and against the chief of the bakers. And he put them in ward in the house of the captain of the guard, into the prison, the place where Joseph was bound. And the captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he served them: and they continued a season in ward. And they dreamed a dream both of them, each man his dream in one night, each man according to the interpretation of his dream, the butler and the baker of the king of Egypt, which were bound in the prison. And Joseph came in unto them in the morning, and looked upon them, and, behold, they were sad. And he asked Pharaoh's officers that were with him in the ward of his lord's house, saying, Wherefore look ye so sadly to day? And they said unto him, We have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter of it. And Joseph said unto them, Do not interpretations belong to God? tell me them, I pray you. And the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, In my dream, behold, a vine was before me; And in the vine were three branches: and it was as though it budded, and her blossoms shot forth; and the clusters thereof brought forth ripe grapes: And Pharaoh's cup was in my hand: and I took the grapes, and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I gave the cup into Pharaoh's hand. And Joseph said unto him, This is the interpretation of it: The three branches are three days: Yet within three days shall Pharaoh lift up thine head, and restore thee unto thy place: and thou shalt deliver Pharaoh's cup into his hand, after the former manner when thou wast his butler. But think on me when it shall be well with thee, and shew kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house: For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews: and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon.'—GENESIS xl. 1-15.

POTIPHAR was 'captain of the guard,' or, as the title literally runs, chief of the executioners. In that capacity he had charge of the prison, which was connected with his house (Gen. xl. 3). It is, therefore, quite intelligible that he should have put Joseph in confinement on his own authority, and the distinction drawn between such a prisoner and the 'king's prisoners,' who were there by royal warrant or due process of law, is natural. Such high-handed treatment of a slave was a small matter, and it was merciful as well as arrogant, for death would have been the punishment of the crime of which Joseph was accused. Either Potiphar was singularly lenient, or, as is perhaps more probable, he did not quite believe his wife's story, and thought it best to hush up a scandal. The transfer of Joseph from the house to the adjoining prison would be quietly managed, and then no more need be said about an ugly business.

So now we see him at the lowest ebb of his fortunes, flung down in a moment by a lie from the height to which he had slowly been climbing, having lost the confidence of his master, and earned the unslumbering hatred of a wicked woman. He had wrecked his career by his goodness. 'What a fool!' says the world. 'How badly managed things are in this life,' say doubters, 'that virtue should not be paid by prosperity!' But the end, even the nearer end in this life, will show whether he was a fool, and whether things are so badly arranged; and the lesson enforced by the picture of Joseph in his dungeon, and which young beginners in life have special need to learn, is that, come what will of it, right is right, and sin is sin, that consequences are never to deter from duty, and that it is better to have a clean conscience and be in prison than do wickedness and sit at a king's table. A very threadbare lesson, but needing to be often repeated.

'But the Lord was with Joseph.' That is one of the eloquent 'buts' of Scripture. The prison is light when God is there, and chains do not chafe if He wraps His love round them. Many a prisoner for God since Joseph's time has had his experience repeated, and received tenderer tokens from Him in a dungeon than ever before. Paul the prisoner, John in Patmos, Bunyan in Bedford jail, George Fox in Lancaster Castle, Rutherford in Aberdeen, and many more, have found the Lord with them, and showing them His kindness. We may all be sure that, if ever faithfulness to conscience involves us in difficulties, the faithfulness and the difficulties will combine to bring to us sweet and strong tokens of God's approval and presence, the winning of which will make a prison a palace and a gate of heaven.

Joseph's relations to jailer and fellow-prisoners are beautiful and instructive. The former is called 'the keeper of the prison,' and is evidently Potiphar's deputy, in more immediate charge of the prison. Of course, the great man had an underling to do the work, and probably that underling was not chosen for sweetness of temper or facile leniency to his charges. But he fell under the charm of Joseph's character—all the more readily, perhaps, because his occupation had not brought many good men to his knowledge. This jewel would flash all the more brightly for the dark background of criminals, and the jailer would wonder at a type of character so unlike what he was accustomed to. Eastern prisons to-day present a curious mixture of cruelty and companionship. The jailers are on intimate terms with prisoners, and yet are ready to torture them. There is no discipline, nor any rules, nor inspection. The jailer does as he likes. So it seems to have been in Egypt, and there would be nothing unnatural in making a prisoner jailer of the rest, and leaving everything in his hands. The 'keeper of the prison' was lazy, like most of us, and very glad to shift duties on to any capable shoulders. Such a thing would, of course, be impossible with us, but it is a bit of true local colouring here.

Joseph won hearts because God was with him, as the story is careful to point out. Our religion should recommend us, and therefore itself, to those who have to do with us. It is not enough that we should be severely righteous, as Joseph had been, or ready to meet trouble with stoical resignation, but we are to be gentle and lovable, gracious towards men, because we receive grace from God. We owe it to our Lord and to our fellows, and to ourselves, to be magnets to attract to Jesus, by showing how fair He can make a life. Joseph in prison found work to do, and he did not shirk it. He might have said to himself: 'This is poor work for me, who had all Potiphar's house to rule. Shall such a man as I come down to such small tasks as this?' He might have sulked or desponded in idleness, but he took the kind of work that offered, and did his best by it. Many young people nowadays do nothing because they think themselves above the small humdrum duties that lie near them. It would do some of us good to remember Joseph in the jail, and his cheerful discharge of what his hands found to do there.

Of course, work done 'because the Lord was with him,' in the consciousness of His presence, and in obedience to Him, went well. 'The Lord made it to prosper,' as He always will make such work.

'When thou dost favour any action,
It runs, it flies.'

And even if, sometimes, work done in the fear of the Lord does not outwardly prosper, it does so in deepest truth, if it work in us the peaceable fruit of righteousness. We need to have a more Christian idea of what constitutes prosperity, and then we shall understand that there are no exceptions to the law that, if a man does his work by God and with God and for God, 'that which he does, the Lord makes it to prosper.'

The help that Joseph gave by interpreting the two high officials' dreams cannot be considered here in detail, but we note that the names of similar officers, evidently higher in rank than we should suppose, with our notions of bakers and butlers, are found in Egyptian documents, and that these two were 'king's prisoners,' and put in charge of Potiphar, who alleviated their imprisonment by detailing Joseph as their attendant, thus showing that his feeling to the young Hebrew was friendly still. Dreams are the usual method of divine communication in Genesis, and belong to a certain stage in the process of revelation. The friend of God, who is in touch with Him, can interpret these. 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him,' and it is still true that they who live close by God have insight into His purposes. Joseph showed sympathy with the two dreamers, and his question, 'Why look ye so sadly?' unlocked their hearts. He was not so swallowed up in his own trouble as to be blind to the signs of another's sorrow, or slow to try to comfort. Grief is apt to make us selfish, but it is meant to make us tender of heart and quick of hand to help our fellows in calamity. We win comfort for our own sorrows by trying to soothe those of others. Jesus stooped to suffer that He might succour them that suffer, and we are to tread in His steps.

JOSEPH, THE PRIME MINISTER

'And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is? And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art: Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled: only in the throne will I be greater than thou. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand, and arrayed him in vestures of fine linen, and put a gold chain about his neck; And he made him to ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried before him, Bow the knee: and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I am Pharaoh, and without thee shall no man lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-paaneah; and he gave him to wife Asenath the daughter of Poti-pherah priest of On. And Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt. And Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt. And in the seven plenteous years the earth brought forth by handfuls. And he gathered up all the food of the seven years, which were in the land of Egypt, and laid up the food in the cities: the food of the field, which was round about every city, laid he up in the same.'

GENESIS xli. 38-48.

AT seventeen years of age Joseph was sold for a slave; at thirty he was prime minister of Egypt (Gen. xxxvii. 2; xli. 46). How long his prison life lasted is uncertain; but it was long enough for the promises contained in his early dreams to 'try him' (Ps. cv. 19) whether his faith would stand apparent disappointment and weary delay. Like all the Scripture narratives, this history of Joseph has little to say about feelings, and prefers facts. But we can read between the lines, and be tolerably sure that the thirteen years of trial were well endured, and that the inward life had grown so as to fit him for his advancement. We have here a full-length portrait of the prime minister, or vizier, which brings out three points—his elevation, his naturalisation, and his administration.

Joseph had not only interpreted Pharaoh's dream, but had suggested a policy in preparation for the coming famine. He had recommended the appointment of 'a wise and discreet man,' with supreme authority over the land. Pharaoh first consulted 'his servants,' and, with their consent, possibly not very hearty, appointed the proposer of the plan as its carrier-out, quoting to him his own words, 'wise and discreet.'

The sudden installing of an unknown prisoner in high office has often been thought hard to believe, and has been pointed to as proof of the legendary character of the story. But the ground on which Pharaoh put it goes far to explain it. He and his servants had come to believe that 'God' spoke through this man, that 'the Spirit of God' was in him. So here was a divinely sent messenger, whom it would be impiety and madness to reject. Observe that Pharaoh and Joseph both speak in this chapter of 'God.' There was a common ground of recognition of a divine Being on which they met. The local colour of the story indicates a period before the fuller revelation, which drew so broad a line of demarcation between Israel and the other nations.

Joseph's sudden promotion is made the more intelligible by the probability which the study of Egyptian history has given, that the Pharaoh who made him his second in command was one of the Hyksos conquerors who dominated Egypt for a long period. They would have no prejudices against Joseph on account of his being a foreigner. A dynasty of alien conquerors has generally an open door for talent, and cares little who a man's father is, or where he comes from, if he can do his work. And Joseph, by not being an Egyptian born, would be all the fitter an instrument for carrying out the policy which he had suggested.

His ceremonial investiture with the insignia of office is true to Egyptian manners. The signet ring, as the emblem of full authority; the chain, as a mark of dignity; the robe of 'fine linen' (or rather of cotton), which was a priestly dress—all are illustrated by the monuments. The proclamation made before him as he rode in the second chariot has been very variously interpreted. It has been taken for a Hebraised Egyptian word, meaning 'Cast thyself down'; and this interpretation was deemed the most probable, until Assyrian discovery brought to light 'that *abarakku* is the Assyrian name of the grand vizier' (Fr. Delitzsch, *Hebrew Language Viewed in the Light of Assyrian Research*, p. 26). Sayce proposes another explanation, also from the cuneiform tablets: 'There was a word *abrik* in the Sumerian language, which signified a seer, and was borrowed by the Semitic Babylonians under the varying forms of *abrikku* and *abarakku*. It is *abrikku* which we have in Genesis, and the title applied by the people to the "seer" Joseph proves to be the one we should most naturally expect.' The Tel el-Amarna tablets show that the knowledge of cuneiform writing was common in Egypt (Sayce, *Higher Criticism and the Monuments*, p. 214). This explanation is tempting, but it is perhaps scarcely probable that the proclamation should have been in any other language than Egyptian, or should have had reference to anything but Joseph's new office. It was not as seer that he was to be obeyed, but as Pharaoh's representative, even though he had become the latter because he had proved himself the former.

But in any case, the whole context is accurately and strongly Egyptian. Was there any point in the history of Israel, down to an impossibly late date, except the time of Moses, at which Jewish writers were so familiar with Egypt as to have been capable of producing so true a picture?

The lessons of this incident are plain. First stands out, clear and full, the witness it bears to God's faithfulness, and to His sovereign sway over all events. What are all the persons concerned in the narrative but unconscious instruments of His? The fierce brothers, the unconcerned slave-dealers, Potiphar, his wife, the prisoners, Pharaoh, are so many links in a chain; but they are also men, and therefore free to act, and guilty if acting wrongly. Men execute God's purposes, even when unconscious or rebellious, but are responsible, and often punished, for the acts which He uses to effect His designs.

Joseph's thirteen years of trial, crowned with sudden prosperity, may read all of us, and especially young men and women, a lesson of patience. Many of us have to fight our way through analogous difficulties at the outset of our career; and we are apt to lose heart and get restive when success seems slow to come, and one hindrance after another blocks our road. But hindrances are helps. If one of Joseph's misfortunes had been omitted, his good fortune would never have come. If his brethren had not hated him, if he had not been sold, if he had not been imprisoned, he would never have ruled Egypt. Not one thread in the tapestry could have been withdrawn without spoiling the pattern. We cannot afford to lose one of our sorrows or trials. There would be no summer unless winter had gone before. There is a bud or a fruit for every snowflake, and a bird's song for every howl of the storm.

Plainly, too, does the story read the lesson of quiet doing of the work and accepting the circumstances of the moment. Joseph was being prepared for the administration of a kingdom by his oversight of Potiphar's house and of the prison. His character was matured by his trials, as iron is consolidated by heavy hammers. To resist temptation, to do modestly and sedulously whatever work comes to our hands, to be content to look after a jail even though we have dreamed of sun and moon bowing down to us, is the best apprenticeship for whatever elevation circumstances—or, to speak more devoutly, God—intends for us. Young men thrown into city life far away from their homes, and whispered to by many seducing voices, have often to suffer for keeping themselves unspotted; but they are being strengthened by rough discipline, and will get such promotion, in due time, as is good for them. But outward success is not God's best gift. It was better to be the Joseph who deserved his high place, than to have the place. The character which he had grown into was more than the trappings which Pharaoh put on him. And such a character is always the reward of such patience, faith, and self-control, whether chains and chariots are added or not.

Little need be said about the other points of the story. Joseph's naturalisation as an Egyptian was complete. His name was changed, in token that he had completely become a subject of Pharaoh's. The meaning of the formidable-looking polysyllable, which Egyptian lips found easier than 'Joseph,' is uncertain. 'At present the origin of the first syllable is still doubtful, and though the latter part of the name is certainly the Egyptian *n-ti-pa-ankh* ("of the life"), it is difficult to say in which of its different senses the expression *pa-ankh* ("the life") is employed' (Sayce, *ut supra*, p. 213). The prevailing opinion of Egyptian experts is that it means 'Support of life.'

The naturalising was completed by his marriage to Asenath (supposed to mean 'One belonging to the goddess Neith'), a daughter of a high officer of state, Poti-phera (meaning, like its shortened form, Potiphar, 'The gift of Ra' the sun-god). Such an alliance placed him at once in the very innermost circle of Egyptian aristocracy. It may have been a bitter pill for the priest to swallow, to give his daughter to a man of yesterday, and an alien; but, just as probably, he too looked to Joseph with some kind of awe, and was not unwilling to wed Asenath to the first man in the empire, wherever he had started up from.

But should not Joseph's religion have barred such a marriage? The narrator gives no judgment on the fact, and we have to form our own estimate. But it is not to be estimated as if it had occurred five or six centuries later. The family of Jacob was not so fenced off, nor was its treasure of revelation so complete, as afterwards. We may be fairly sure that Joseph felt no inconsistency between his ancestral faith, which had become his own in his trials, and this union. He was risking a great deal; that is certain. Whether the venture ended well or ill, we know not. Only we may be very sure that a marriage in which a common faith is not a strong bond of union lacks its highest sanctity, and is perilously apt to find that difference in religious convictions is a strong separator.

Joseph's administration opens up questions as to Egyptian land tenure, and the like, which cannot be dealt with here. 'In the earlier days of the monarchy the country was in the hands of great feudal lords; . . . the land belonged to them absolutely. . . . But after the convulsion caused by the Hyksos conquest and the war of independence, this older system of land tenure was completely changed. . . . The Pharaoh is the fountain head, not only of honour, but of property as well. . . . The people ceased to have any rights of their own' (Sayce, *ut supra*, p. 216).

We may note Joseph's immediate entrance upon office and his characteristic energy in it. He 'went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt.' No grass grew under this man's feet. He was ubiquitous, personally overseeing everything for seven long years. Wasteful consumption of the abundant crops had to be restrained, storehouses to be built, careful records of the contents to be made, after Egyptian fashion. The people, who could not look so far as seven years ahead, and wanted to enjoy, or make money out of, the good harvests, had to be looked after, and an army of officials to be kept in order. Dignity meant work for him. Like all true men, he thought more of his duty than of his honours. Depend on it, he did not wear his fine clothes or ride in the second chariot, when he was hurrying about the country at his task.

He had come 'out of prison to reign,' and, as we all find, if we are God's servants, to reign means to serve, and the higher the place the harder the task. The long years of waiting had nourished powers which the seven years of busy toil tested. We must make ourselves, by God's help, ready, in obscurity, and especially in youth, for whatever may be laid on us in after days. And if we understand what life here means, we shall be more covetous of spheres of diligent service than of places of shining dignity. Whatever our task, let us do it, as Joseph did his, with strenuous concentration, knowing, as he did, that the years in which it is possible are but few at the longest.

RECOGNITION AND RECONCILIATION

'Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren. And he wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard. And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence. And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and He hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not: And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast: And there will I nourish thee: for yet there are five years of famine; lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty. And, behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaketh unto you. And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen; and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither. And he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. Moreover he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them: and after that his brethren talked with him.'

GENESIS xlv. 1-15.

I

IF the writer of this inimitable scene of Joseph's reconciliation with his brethren was not simply an historian, he was one of the great dramatic geniuses of the world, master of a vivid minuteness like Defoe's, and able to touch the springs of tears by a pathetic simplicity like his who painted the death of Lear. Surely theories of legend and of mosaic work fail here.

1. We have, first, disclosure. The point at which the impenetrable, stern ruler breaks down is significant. It is after Judah's torrent of intercession for Benjamin, and self-sacrificing offer of himself for a substitute and a slave. Why did this touch Joseph so keenly? Was it not because his brother's speech shows that filial and fraternal affection was now strong enough in him to conquer self? He had sent Joseph to the fate which he is now ready to accept. He and the rest had thought nothing of the dagger they plunged into their father's heart by selling Joseph; but now he is prepared to accept bondage if he may save his father's grey head an ache. The whole of Joseph's harsh, enigmatical treatment had been directed to test them, and to ascertain if they were the same fierce, cruel men as of old. Now, when the doubt is answered, he can no longer dam back the flood of forgiving love. The wisest pardoning kindness seeks the assurance of sorrow and change in the offender, before it can safely and wholesomely enjoy the luxury of letting itself out in tears of reconciliation. We do not call

Joseph a type of Christ; but the plain process of forgiveness in his brotherly heart is moulded by the law which applies to God's pardon as to ours. All the wealth of yearning pardon is there, before contrition and repentance; but it is not good for the offender that it should be lavished on him, impenitent.

What a picture that is of the all-powerful ruler, choking down his emotion and hurriedly ordering the audience chamber to be cleared! How many curious glances would be cast over their shoulders, by the slowly withdrawing crowd, at the strange group—the viceroy, usually so calm, thus inexplicably excited, and the huddled, rude shepherds, bewildered and afraid of what was coming next, in this unaccountable country! How eavesdroppers would linger as near as they durst, and how looks would be exchanged as the sounds of passionate weeping rewarded their open ears! The deepest feelings are not to be flaunted before the world. The man who displays his tears, and the man who is too proud to shed them, are both wrong; but perhaps it is worse to weep in public than not to weep at all.

'I am Joseph.' Were ever the pathos of simplicity, and the simplicity of pathos, more nobly expressed than in these two words?—(There are but two in the Hebrew.) Has the highest dramatic genius ever winged an arrow which goes more surely to the heart than that? The question, which hurries after the disclosure, seems strange and needless; but it is beautifully self-revealing, as expressive of agitation, and as disclosing a son's longing, and perhaps, too, as meant to relieve the brothers' embarrassment, and, as it were, to wrap the keen edge of the disclosure in soft wool.

2. We have, next, conscience-stricken silence. No

wonder his brethren 'could not answer' and 'were troubled at his presence.' They had found their brother a ruler; they had found the ruler their brother. Their former crime had turned what might have been a joy into a terror. Already they had come to know and regret it. It might seem to their startled consciences as if now they were about to expiate it. They would remember the severity of Joseph's past intercourse; they see his power, and cannot but be doubtful of his intentions. Had all his strange conduct been manœuvring to get them, Benjamin and all, into his toils, that one blow might perfect his revenge? Our suspicions are the reflections of our own hearts. So there they stand in open-mouthed, but dumb, wonder and dread. It would task the pencil of him who painted, on the mouldering refectory wall at Milan, the conflicting emotions of the apostles, at the announcement of the betrayer, to portray that silent company of abased and trembling criminals. They are an illustration of the profitlessness of all crime. Sin is, as one of its Hebrew names tells us, missing the mark—whether we think of it as fatally failing to reach the ideal of conduct, or as always, by a divine nemesis, failing to hit even the shabby end it aims at. 'Every rogue is a roundabout fool.' They put Joseph in the pit, and here he is on a throne. They have stained their souls, and embittered their father's life for twenty-two long years, and the dreams have come true, and all their wickedness has not turned the stream of the divine purpose, any more than the mud dam built by a child diverts the Mississippi. One flash has burned up their whole sinful past, and they stand scorched and silent among the ruins. So it always is. Sooner or later the same certainty of the futility of his sin will overwhelm every sinful man, and dumb self-condemnation will stand in silent acknowledgment of evil desert before the throne of the Brother, who is now the Prince and the Judge, on whose fiat hangs life or death. To see Christ enthroned should be joy; but it may be turned into terror and silent anticipation of His just condemnation.

3. We have encouragement and complete forgiveness. That invitation to come close up to him, with which Joseph begins the fuller disclosure of his heart, is a beautiful touch. We can fancy how tender the accents, and how, with some lightening of fear, but still hesitatingly and ashamed, the shepherds, unaccustomed to courtly splendours, approached. The little pause while they draw near helps him to self-command, and he resumes his words in a calmer tone. With one sentence of assurance that he is their brother, he passes at once into that serene region where all passion and revenge die, unable to breathe its keen, pure air. The comfort which he addresses to their penitence would have been dangerous, if spoken to men blind to the enormity of their past. But it will not make a truly repentant conscience less sensitive, though it may alleviate the aching of the wound, to think that God has used even its sin for His own purposes. It will not take away the sense of the wickedness of the motive to know that a wonderful providence has rectified the consequences. It will rather deepen the sense of evil, and give new cause of adoration of the love that pardons the wrong, and the providence that neutralises the harm.

Joseph takes the true point of view, which we are all bound to occupy, if we would practise the Christian grace of forgiveness. He looks beyond the mere human hate and envy to the divine purpose. 'The sword is theirs; the hand is Thine. He can even be grateful to his foes who have been unintentionally his benefactors. He thinks of the good that has come out of their malice, and anger dies within him.

Highest attainment of all, the good for which he is grateful is not his all-but-regal dignity, but the power to save and gladden those who would fain have slain, and had saddened him for many a weary year. We read in these utterances of a lofty piety and of a singularly gentle heart, the fruit of sorrow and the expression of thoughts which had slowly grown up in his mind, and had now been long familiar there. Such a calm, certain grasp of the divine shaping and meaning of his life could not have sprung up all at once in him, as he looked at the conscience-stricken culprits cowering before him. More than natural sweetness and placability must have gone to the making of such a temper of forgiveness. He must have been living near the Fountain of all mercy to have had so full a cup of it to offer. Because he had caught a gleam of the divine pardon, he becomes a mirror of it; and we may fairly see in this ill-used brother, yearning over the half-sullen sinners, and seeking to open a way for his forgiveness to steal into their hearts, and rejoicing over his very sorrows which have fitted him to save them alive, and satisfy them in the days of famine, an adumbration of our Elder Brother's forgiving love and saving tenderness.

4. The second part of Joseph's address is occupied with his message to Jacob, and shows how he longed for his father's presence. There is something very natural and beautiful in the repeated exhortations

to haste, as indicating the impatient love of a long-absent son. If his heart was so true to his father, why had he sent him no message for all these years? Egypt was near enough, and for nine years now he had been in power. Surely he could have gratified his heart. But he could not have learned by any other means his brethren's feelings, and if they were still what they had been, no intercourse would be possible. He could only be silent, and yearn for the way to open in God's providence, as it did.

The message to Jacob is sent from 'thy son Joseph,' in token that the powerful ruler lays his dignity at his father's feet. No elevation will ever make a true son forget his reverence for his father. If he rise higher in the world, and has to own an old man, away in some simple country home, for his sire, he will be proud to do it. The enduring sanctity of the family ties is not the least valuable lesson from our narrative for this generation, where social conditions are so often widely different in parents and in children. There is an affectionate spreading out of all his glory before his father's old eyes; not that he cared much about it for himself, since, as we have seen, elevation to him meant mainly work, but because he knew how the eyes would glisten at the sight. His mother, who would have been proud of him, is gone, but he has still the joy of gladdening his father by the exhibition of his dignity. It bespeaks a simple nature, unspoiled by prosperity, to delight thus in his father's delight, and to wish the details of all his splendour to be told him. A statesman who takes most pleasure in his elevation because of the good he can do by it, and because it will please the old people at home, must be a pure and lovable man. The command has another justification in the necessity to assure his father of the wisdom of so great a change. God had set him in the Promised Land, and a very plain divine injunction was needed to warrant his leaving it. Such a one was afterwards given in vision; but the most emphatic account of his son's honour and power was none the less required to make the old Jacob willing to abandon so much, and go into such strange conditions.

We have another instance of the difference between man's purposes and God's counsel in this message Joseph's only thought is to afford his family temporary shelter during the coming five years of famine. Neither he nor they knew that this was the fulfilment of the covenant with Abraham, and the bringing of them into the land of their oppression for four centuries. No shadow of that future was cast upon their joy, and yet, the steady march of God's plan was effected along the path which they were ignorantly preparing. The road-maker does not know what bands of mourners, or crowds of holiday makers, or troops of armed men may pass along it.

5. This wonderfully beautiful scene ends with the kiss of full reconciliation and frank communion. All the fear is out of the brothers' hearts. It has washed away all the envy along with it. The history of Jacob's household had hitherto been full of sins against family life. Now, at last, they taste the sweetness of fraternal love. Joseph, against whom they had sinned, takes the initiative, flinging himself with tears on the neck of Benjamin, his own mother's son, nearer to him than all the others, crowding his pent-up love in one long kiss. Then, with less of passionate affection, but more of pardoning love, he kisses his contrite

brothers. The offender is ever less ready to show love than the offended. The first step towards reconciliation, whether of man with man or of man with God, comes from the aggrieved We always hate those whom we have harmed; and if enmity were ended only by the advances of the wrong-doer, it would be perpetual. The injured has the prerogative of praying the injurer to be reconciled. So was it in Pharaoh's throne-room on that long past day; so is it still in the audience chamber of heaven. 'He that might the vantage best have took found out the remedy.' 'We love Him, because He first loved us.'

The pardoned men find their tongues at last. Forgiveness has opened their lips, and though their reverence and thanks are no less, their confidence and familiarity are more. How they would talk when once the terror was melted away! So should it be with the soul which has tasted the sweetness of Christ's forgiving love, and has known 'the kisses of His mouth.' Long, unrestrained, and happy should be the intercourse which we forgiven sinners keep up with our Brother, the Prince of all the land. 'After that his brethren talked with him.'

JOSEPH, THE PARDONER AND PRESERVER

II

THE noble words in which Joseph dissipates his brothers' doubts have, as their first characteristic, the recognition of the God by whom his career had been shaped, and, for their next, the recognition of the purpose for which it had been. There is a world of tenderness and forgivingness in the addition made to his first words in verse 4, 'Joseph, *your brother.*' He owns the mystic bond of kindred, and thereby assures them of his pardon for their sin against it. It was right that he should remind them of their crime, even while declaring his pardon. But he rises high above all personal considerations and graciously takes the place of soother, instead of that of accuser. Far from cherishing thoughts of anger or revenge, he tries to lighten the reproaches of their own consciences. Thrice over in four verses he traces his captivity to God. He had learned that wisdom in his long years of servitude, and had not forgotten it in those of rule.

There will be little disposition in us to visit offences against ourselves on the offenders, if we discern God's purpose working through our sorrows, and see, as the Psalmist did, that even our foes are 'men which are Thy hand, O Lord.' True, His overruling providence does not make their guilt less; but the recognition of it destroys all disposition to revenge, and injured and injurer may one day unite in adoring the result of what the One suffered at the other's hands. Surely, some Christian persecutors and their victims have thus joined hands in heaven. If we would cultivate the habit of seeing God behind second causes, our hearts would be kept free from much wrath and bitterness.

Joseph was as certain of the purpose as of the source of his elevation. He saw now what he had been elevated for, and he eagerly embraced the task which was a privilege. No doubt, he had often brooded over the thought, 'Why am I thus lifted up?' and had felt the privilege of being a nation's saviour; but now he realises that he has a part to play in fulfilling God's designs in regard to the seed of Abraham. Cloudy as his outlook into the future may have been, he knew that great promises affecting all nations were intertwined with his family, separation from whom had been a sorrow for years. But now the thought comes to him with sudden illumination and joy: 'This, then, is what it all has meant, that I should be a link in the chain of God's workings.' He knows himself to be God's instrument for effecting His covenant promises. How small a thing honour and position became in comparison!

We cannot all have great tasks in the line of God's purposes, but we can all feel that our little ones are made great by being seen to be in it. The less we think about chariots and gold chains, and the more we try to find out what God means by setting us where we are, and to do that, the better for our peace and true dignity. A true man does not care for the rewards of work half as much as for the work itself. Find out what God intends, and never mind whether He puts you in a dungeon or in a palace Both places lie on the road which He has marked and, in either, the main thing is to do His will.

Next comes the swiftly devised plan for carrying out God's purpose. It sounds as if Joseph, with prompt statesmanship, had struck it out then and there. At all events, he pours it forth with contagious earnestness and haste. Note how he says over and over again 'My father,' as if he loved to dwell on the name, but also as if he had not yet completely realised the renewal of the broken ties of brotherhood. It was some trial of the stuff he was made of, to have to bring his father and his family to be stared at, and perhaps mocked at, by the court. Many a successful man would be very much annoyed if his old father, in his country clothes, and hands roughened by toil, sat down beside him in his prosperity. Joseph had none of that baseness. Jacob would come, if at all, as a half-starved immigrant, and would be 'an abomination to the Egyptians.' But what of that? He was 'my father,' and his son knows no better use to make of his dignity than to compel reverence for Jacob's grey hairs, which he will take care shall *not* be 'brought down with sorrow to the grave.' It is a very homely lesson—never be ashamed of your father. But in these days, when children are often better educated than their parents, and rise above them in social importance, it is a very needful one.

The first overtures of reconciliation should come from the side of the injured party. That is Christ's law, and if it were Christians' practice, there would be fewer alienations among them. It is Christ's law, because it is Christ's own way of dealing with us. He, too, was envied, and sold by His brethren. His sufferings were meant 'to preserve life.' Stephen's sermon in the Sanhedrin dwells on Joseph as a type of Christ; and the typical character is seen not least distinctly in this, that He against whom we have sinned pleads with us, seeks to draw us nearer to Himself, and to lead us to put away all hard thoughts of Him, and to cherish all loving ones towards Him, by showing us how void His heart is of anger against us, and how full of yearning love and of gracious intention to provide for us a dwelling-place, with abundance of all needful good, beside Himself, while the years of famine shall last.

GROWTH BY TRANSPLANTING

Then Joseph came and told Pharaoh, and said, My father and my brethren, and their flocks, and their herds, and all that they have, are come out of the land of Canaan; and, behold, they are in the land of Goshen. And he took some of his brethren, even five men, and presented them unto Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said unto his brethren, What is your occupation? And they said unto Pharaoh, Thy servants are shepherds, both we, and also our fathers. They said moreover unto Pharaoh, For to sojourn in the land are we come; for thy servants have no pasture for their flocks; for the famine is sore in the land of Canaan: now therefore, we pray thee, let thy servants dwell in the land of Goshen. And Pharaoh spake unto Joseph, saying, Thy father and thy brethren are come unto thee: The land of Egypt is before thee; in the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell; in the land of Goshen let them dwell: and if thou knowest any men of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle. And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh: and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou? And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage. And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from before Pharaoh. And Joseph placed his father and his brethren, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. And Joseph nourished his father, and his brethren, and all his father's household, with bread, according to their families.'—GENESIS xlvii. 1-12.

1. THE conduct of Joseph in reference to the settlement in Goshen is an example of the possibility of uniting worldly prudence with high religious principle and great generosity of nature. He had promised his brothers a home in that fertile eastern district, which afforded many advantages in its proximity to Canaan, its adaptation to pastoral life, and its vicinity to Joseph when in Zoan, the capital. But he had not consulted Pharaoh, and, however absolute his authority, it scarcely stretched to giving away Egyptian territory without leave. So his first care, when the wanderers arrive, is to manage the confirmation of the grant. He goes about it with considerable astuteness—a hereditary quality, which is redeemed from blame because used for unselfish purposes and unstained by deceit. He does not tell Pharaoh how far he had gone, but simply announces that his family

are in Goshen, as if awaiting the monarch's further pleasure. Then he introduces a deputation, no doubt carefully chosen, of five of his brothers (as if the whole number would have been too formidable), previously instructed how to answer. He knows what Pharaoh is in the habit of asking, or he knows that he can lead him to ask the required question, which will bring out the fact of their being shepherds, and utilise the prejudice against that occupation, to ensure separation in Goshen. All goes as he had arranged. Thanks partly to the indifference of the king, who seems to have been rather a *roi fainéant* in the hands of his energetic *maire du palais*, and to have been contented to give, with a flourish of formality, as a command to Joseph, what Joseph had previously carefully suggested to him (vers. 6, 7). There is nothing unfair in all this. It is good, shrewd management, and no fault can be found with it; but it is a new trait in the ideal character of a servant of God, and contrasts strongly with the type shown in Abraham. None the less, it is a legitimate element in the character and conduct of a good man, set down to do God's work in such a world. Joseph is a saint and a politician. His shrewdness is never craft; sagacity is not alien to consecration. No doubt it has to be carefully watched lest it degenerate; but prudence is as needful as enthusiasm, and he is the complete man who has a burning fire down in his heart to generate the force that drives him, and a steady hand on the helm, and a keen eye on the chart, to guide him. Be ye 'wise as serpents' but also 'harmless as doves.'

2. We may note in Joseph's conduct also an instance of a man in high office and not ashamed of his humble relations. One of the great lessons meant to be

taught by the whole patriarchal period was the sacredness of the family. That is, in some sense, the keynote of Joseph's history. Here we see family love, which had survived the trial of ill-usage and long absence, victorious over the temptation of position and high associates. It took some nerve and a great deal of affection, for the viceroy, whom envious and sarcastic courtiers watched, to own his kin. What a sweet morsel for malicious tongues it would be, 'Have you heard? He is only the son of an old shepherd, who is down in Goshen, come to pick up some crumbs there!' One can fancy the curled lips and the light laugh, as the five brothers, led by the great man himself, made their rustic reverences to Pharaoh. It is as if some high official in Paris were to walk in half a dozen peasants in blouse and sabots, and present them to the president as 'my brothers.' It was a brave thing to do; and it teaches a lesson which many people, who have made their way in the world, would be nobler and more esteemed if they learned.

3. The brother's words to Pharaoh are another instance of that ignorant carrying out of the divine purposes which we have already had to notice. They evidently contemplate only a temporary stay in the country. They say that they are come 'to *sojourn*'—the verb from which are formed the noun often rendered '*strangers*,' and that which Jacob uses in verse 9, 'my *pilgrimage*.' The reason for their coming is given as the transient scarcity of pasturage in Canaan, which implies the intention of return as soon as that was altered. Joseph had the same idea of the short duration of their stay; and though Jacob had been taught by vision that the removal was in

order to their being made a great nation, it does not seem that his sons' intentions were affected by that—if they knew it. So mistaken are our estimates. We go to a place for a month, and we stay in it for twenty years. We go to a place to settle for life, and our tent-pegs are pulled up in a week. They thought of five years, and it was to be nearly as many centuries. They thought of temporary shelter and food; God meant an education of them and their descendants. Over all this story the unseen Hand hovers, chastising, guiding, impelling; and the human agents are free and yet fulfilling an eternal purpose, blind and yet accountable, responsible for motives, and mercifully ignorant of consequences. So we all play our little parts. We have no call to be curious as to what will come of our deeds. This end of the action, the motive of it, is our care; the other end, the outcome of it, is God's business to see to.

4. We may also observe how trivial incidents are wrought into God's scheme. The Egyptian hatred of the shepherd class secured one of the prime reasons for the removal from Canaan—the unimpeded growth of a tribe into a nation. There was no room for further peaceful and separate expansion in that thickly populated country. Nor would there have been in Egypt, unless under the condition of comparative isolation, which could not have been obtained in any other way. Thus an unreasonable prejudice, possibly connected with religious ideas, became an important factor in the development of Israel; and, once again, we have to note the wisdom of the great Builder who uses not only gold, silver, and precious stones, but even wood, hay, stubble—follies and sins—for His edifice.

5. The interview of Jacob with Pharaoh is pathetic and beautiful. The old man comports himself, in all the later history of Joseph, as if done with the world, and waiting to go. 'Let me die, since I have seen thy face,' was his farewell to life. He takes no part in the negotiation about Goshen, but has evidently handed over all temporal cares to younger hands. A halo of removedness lies round his grey hairs, and to Pharaoh he behaves as one withdrawn from fleeting things, and, by age and nearness to the end, superior even to a king's dignity. As he enters the royal presence he does not do reverence, but invokes a blessing upon him. 'The less is blessed of the better.' He has nothing to do with court ceremonials or conventionalities. The hoary head is a crown of honour, Pharaoh recognises his right to address him thus by the kindly question as to his age, which implied respect for his years. The answer of the 'Hebrew Ulysses,' as Stanley calls him, breathes a spirit of melancholy not unnatural in one who had once more been uprooted, and found himself again a wanderer in his old age. The tremulous voice has borne the words across all the centuries, and has everywhere evoked a response in the hearts of weary and saddened men. Look at the component parts of this pensive retrospect.

Life has been to him a 'pilgrimage.' He thinks of all his wanderings from that far-off day when at Bethel he received the promise of God's presence 'in all places whither thou goest,' till this last happy and yet disturbing change. But he is thinking not only, perhaps not chiefly, of the circumstances, but of the spirit, of his life. This is, no doubt, the confession 'that they were strangers and pilgrims' referred to in the Epistle to the Hebrews. He was a pilgrim, not because he had often changed his place of abode, but because he sought the 'city which hath foundations,' and therefore could not be at home here. The goal of his life lay in the far future; and whether he looked for the promises to be fulfilled on earth, or had the unformulated consciousness of immortality, and saluted the dimly descried coast from afar while tossing on life's restless ocean, he was effectually detached from the present, and felt himself an alien in the existing order. We have to live by the same hope, and to let it work the same estrangement, if we would live noble lives. Not because all life is change, nor because it all marches steadily on to the grave, but because our true home—the community to which we really belong, the metropolis, the mother city of our souls—is above, are we to feel ourselves strangers upon earth. They who only take into account the transiency of life are made sad, or sometimes desperate, by the unwelcome thought. But they whose pilgrimage is a journey home may look that transiency full in the face, and be as glad because of it as colonists on their voyage to the old country which they call 'home,' though they were born on the other side of the world and have never seen its green fields.

To Jacob's eyes his days seem 'few.' Abraham's one hundred and seventy-five years, Isaac's one hundred and eighty, were in his mind. But more than these was in his mind. The law of the moral perspective is other than that of the physical. The days in front, seen through the glass of anticipation, are drawn out; the days behind, viewed through the telescope of memory, are crowded together. What a moment looked all the long years of his struggling life—

shorter now than even had once seemed the seven years of service for his Rachel, that love had made to fly past on such swift wings! That happy wedded life, how short it looked! A bright light for a moment, and

> 'Ere a man could say "Behold!"
> The jaws of darkness did devour it up.'

It is well to lay the coolness of this thought on our fevered hearts, and, whether they be torn by sorrows or gladdened with bliss, to remember 'this also will pass' and the longest stretch of dreary days be seen in retrospect, in their due relation to eternity, as but a moment. That will not paralyse effort nor abate sweetness, but it will teach proportion, and deliver from the illusions of this solid-seeming shadow which we call life.

The pensive retrospect darkens as the old man's memory dwells upon the past. His days have not only been few—that could be borne—but they have been 'evil,' by which I understand not unfortunate so much as faulty. We have seen in preceding pages the slow process by which the crafty Jacob had his sins purged out of him, and became 'God's wrestler.' Here we learn that old wrong-doing, even when forgiven—or, rather, when and because forgiven—leaves regretful memories lifelong. The early treachery had been long ago repented of and pardoned by God and man. The nature which hatched it had been renewed. But here it starts up again, a ghost from the grave, and the memory of it is full of bitterness. No lapse of time deprives a sin of its power to sting. As in the old story of the man who was killed by a rattlesnake's poison fang embedded in a boot which had lain forgotten for years, we may be wounded by suddenly coming against it, long after it is forgiven by God and almost forgotten by ourselves. Many a good man, although he knows that Christ's blood has washed away his guilt, is made to possess the iniquities of his youth. 'Thou shalt be ashamed and confounded, and never open thy mouth any more, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done.'

But this shaded retrospect is one-sided. It is true, and in some moods seems all the truth; but Jacob saw more distinctly, and his name was rightly Israel, when, laying his trembling hands on the heads of Joseph's sons, he laid there the blessing of 'the God which fed me all my life long, . . . the Angel which redeemed me from all evil.' That was his last thought about his life, as it began to be seen in the breaking light of eternal day. Pensive and penitent memory may call the years few and evil, but grateful faith even here, and still more the cleared vision of heaven, will discern more truly that they have been a long miracle of loving care, and that all their seeming evil has been transmuted into good.

TWO RETROSPECTS OF ONE LIFE

'And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.'—Genesis xlvii. 9.

'The God which fed me all my life long unto this day; the Angel which redeemed me from all evil.'—Genesis xlviii. 15, 16.

These are two strangely different estimates of the same life to be taken by the same man. In the latter Jacob categorically contradicts everything that he had said in the former. 'Few and evil,' he said before Pharaoh. 'All my life long,' 'the Angel which redeemed me from all evil,' he said on his death-bed.

If he meant what he said when he spoke to Pharaoh, and characterised his life thus, he was wrong. He was possibly in a melancholy mood. Very naturally, the unfamiliar splendours of a court dazzled and bewildered the old man, accustomed to a quiet shepherd life down at Hebron. He had not come to see Pharaoh, he only cared to meet Joseph; and, as was quite natural, the new and uncongenial surroundings depressed him. Possibly the words are only a piece of the etiquette of an Eastern court, where it is the correct thing for the subject to depreciate himself in all respects as far inferior to the prince. And there may be little more than conventional humility in the words of my first text. But I am rather disposed to think that they express the true feeling of the moment, in a mood that passed and was followed by a more wholesome one.

I put the two sayings side by side just for the sake of gathering up one or two plain lessons from them.

1. We have here two possible views of life.

Now the key to the difference between these two statements and moods of feeling seems to me to be a very plain one. In the former of them there is nothing about God. It is all Jacob. In the latter we notice that there is a great deal more about God than about Jacob, and that determines the whole tone of the retrospect. In the first text Jacob speaks of 'the days of the years of *my* pilgrimage,' 'the days of the years of *my* life,' and so on, without a syllable about anything except the purely earthly view of life. Of course, when you shut out God, the past is all dark enough, grey and dismal, like the landscape on some cloudy day, where the woods stand black, and the rivers creep melancholy through colourless fields, and the sky is grey and formless above. Let the sun come out, and the river flashes into a golden mirror, and the woods are alive with twinkling lights and shadows, and the sky stretches a blue pavilion above them, and all the birds sing. Let God into your life, and its whole complexion and characteristics change. The man who sits whining and complaining, when he has shut out the thought of a divine Presence, finds that everything alters when he brings that in.

And, then, look at the two particulars on which the patriarch dwells. 'I am only one hundred and thirty years old,' he says; a mere infant compared with Abraham and Isaac! How did he know he was not going to live to be as old as either of them? And 'if his days were evil,' as he said, was it not a good thing that they were few? But, instead of that, he finds reasons for complaint in the brevity of the life which, if it were as evil as he made it out to be, must often have seemed wearisomely long, and dragged very slowly. Now, both things are true—life is short, life is long. Time is elastic—you can stretch it or you can contract it. It is short compared with the duration of God; it is short, as one of the Psalms puts it pathetically, as compared with this Nature round us—'The earth abideth for ever'; we are strangers upon it, and there is no abiding for us. It is short as compared with the capacities and powers of the creatures that possess it; but, oh! if we think of our days as a series of gifts of God, if we look upon them, as Jacob looked upon them when he was sane, as being one continued shepherding by God, they stretch out into blessed length. Life is long enough if it manifests that God takes care of us, and if we learn that He does. Life is long enough if it serves to build up a God-pleasing character.

It is beautiful to see how the thought of God enters into the dying man's remembrances in the shape which was natural to him, regard being had to his own daily avocations. For the word translated 'fed' means much more than supplied with nourishment. It is the word for doing the office of shepherd, and we must not forget, if we want to understand its beauty, that Jacob's sons said, 'Thy servants are shepherds; both we and also our fathers.' So this man, in the solitude of his pastoral life, and whilst living amongst his woolly people who depended upon his guidance and care, had learned many a lesson as to how graciously and tenderly and constantly fed, and led, and protected, and fostered by God were the creatures of His hand.

It was he, I suppose, who first gave to religious thought that metaphor which has survived temple and sacrifice and priesthood, and will survive even earth itself; for 'I am the Good Shepherd' is as true to-day as when first spoken by Jesus, and 'the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall lead them,' and be their Shepherd when the flock is carried to the upper pastures and the springs that never fail. The life which has brought us that thought of a Shepherd-God has been long enough; and the days which have been so expanded as to contain a continuous series of His benefits and protections need never be remembered as 'few,' whatsoever be the arithmetic that is applied to them.

The other contradiction is equally eloquent and significant. 'Few and evil' have my days been, said

Jacob, when he was not thinking about God; but when he remembered the Angel of the Presence, that mysterious person with whom he had wrestled at Peniel, and whose finger had lamed the thigh while His lips proclaimed a blessing, his view changed, and instead of talking about 'evil' days, he says, 'The Angel that redeemed me from all evil.' Yes, his life had been evil, whether by that we mean sorrowful or sinful, and the sorrows and the sins had been closely connected. A sorely tried man he had been. Far away back in the past had been his banishment from home; his disappointment and hard service with the churlish Laban; the misbehaviour of his sons; the death of Rachel—that wound which was never stanched; and then the twenty years' mourning for Rachel's son, the heir of his inheritance. These were the evils, the sins were as many, for every one of the sorrows, except perhaps the chiefest of them all, had its root in some piece of duplicity, dishonesty, or failure. But he was there in Egypt beside Joseph. The evils had stormed over him, but he was there still. And so at the end he says, 'The Angel . . . redeemed me from evil, though it smote me. Sorrow became chastisement, and I was purged of my sin by my calamities.' The sorrows are past, like some raging inundation that comes up for a night over the land and then subsides; but the blessing of fertility which it brought in its tawny waves abides with me yet. Joseph is by my side. 'I had not thought to see thy face, and God hath showed me the face of thy seed.' That sorrow is over. Rachel's grave is still by the wayside, and that sorest of sorrows has wrought with others to purify character. Jacob has been tried by sorrows: he has been purged from sins. 'The Angel delivered me from all evil.' So, dear friends, sorrow is not evil if it helps to strip us from the evil that we love, and the ills that we bear are good if they alienate our affections from the ills that we do.

2. Secondly, note the wisdom and the duty of taking the completer and brighter view

These first words of Jacob's are very often quoted as if they were the pattern of the kind of thing people ought to say, 'Few and evil have been the days of the years of my pilgrimage.' That is a text from which many sermons have been preached with approbation of the pious resignation expressed in it. But it does not seem to me that that is the tone of them. If the man believed what he said, then he was very ungrateful and short-sighted, though there were excuses to be made for him under the circumstances. If the days had been evil, he had made them so.

But the point which I wish to make now is that it is largely a matter for our own selection which of the two views of our lives we take. We may make our choice whether we shall fix our attention on the brighter or on the darker constituents of our past.

Suppose a wall papered with paper of two colours, one black, say, and the other gold. You can work your eye and adjust the focus of vision so that you may see either a black background or a gold one. In the one case the prevailing tone is gloomy, relieved by an occasional touch of brightness; and in the other it is brightness, heightened by a background of darkness. And so you can do with life, fixing attention on its sorrows, and hugging yourselves in the contemplation of these with a kind of morbid satisfaction, or bravely and thankfully and submissively and wisely resolving that you will rather seek to learn what God means by darkness, and not forgetting to look at the unenigmatical blessings, and plain, obvious mercies, that make up so much of our lives. We have to govern memory as well as other faculties, by Christian principle. We have to apply the plain teaching of Christian truth to our sentimental, and often unwholesome, contemplations of the past. There is enough in all our lives to make material for plenty of whining and complaining, if we choose to take hold of them by that handle. And there is enough in all our lives to make us ashamed of one murmuring word, if we are devout and wise and believing enough to lay hold of them by that one. Remember that you can make your view of your life either a bright one or a dark one, and there will be facts for both; but the facts that feed melancholy are partial and superficial, and the facts that exhort, 'Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice,' are deep and fundamental.

3. So, lastly, note how blessed a thing it is when the last look is the happiest.

When we are amongst the mountains, or when we are very near them, they look barren enough, rough, stony, steep. When we travel away from them, and look at them across the plain, they lie blue in the distance; and the violet shadows and the golden lights upon them and the white peaks above make a dream of beauty. Whilst we are in the midst of the struggle, we are often tempted to think that things go hardly with us and that the road is very rough. But if we keep near our dear Lord, and hold by His hand, and try to shape our lives in accordance with His will—whatever be their outward circumstances and texture—then we may be very sure of this, that when the end comes, and we are far enough away from some of the sorrows to see what they lead to and blossom into, then we shall be able to say, It was all very good, and to thank Him for all the way by which the Lord our God has led us.

In the same conversation in which the patriarch, rising to the height of a prophet and organ of divine revelation, gives this his dying testimony of the faithfulness of God, and declares that he has been delivered from all evil, he recurs to the central sorrow of his life; and speaks, though in calm words, of that day when he buried Rachel by 'Ephrath, which is Bethel.' But the pain had passed and the good was present to him. And so, leaving life, he left it according to his own word, 'satisfied with favour, and full of the blessing of the Lord.' So we in our turns may, at the last, hope that what we know not now will largely be explained; and may seek to anticipate our dying verdict by a living confidence, in the midst of our toils and our sorrows, that 'all things work together for good to them that love God.'

'THE HANDS OF THE MIGHTY GOD OF JACOB'

The archers shot at him, but his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.'

GENESIS xlix. 23, 24.

THESE picturesque words are part of what purports to be one of the oldest pieces of poetry in the Bible—the dying Jacob's prophetic blessing on his sons. Of these sons there are two over whom his heart seems especially to pour itself—Judah the ancestor of the royal tribe, and Joseph. The future fortunes of their descendants are painted in most glowing colours. And of these two, the blessing on the 'son who was dead and is alive again, who was lost and is found,' is the fuller of tender desire and glad prediction. The words of our text are probably to be taken as prophecy, not as history—as referring to the future conflicts and victories of the tribe, not to the past trials and triumphs of its father. But be that as it may, they contain, in most vivid metaphor, the earliest utterance of a very familiar truth. They are the first hint of that thought which is caught up and expanded in many a later saying of psalmist, and prophet, and apostle. We hear their echoes in the great song ascribed to David 'in the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul': 'He teacheth my hands to war, so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms'; and the idea receives its fullest carrying out and noblest setting forth, in the trumpet-call of the apostle, who had seen more formidable weapons and a more terrible military discipline in Rome's legions than Jacob knew, and who pressed them into his stimulating call: 'Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.' 'Put on the whole armour of God.' Strength for conflict by contact with the strength of God is the common thought of all these passages—a very familiar thought, which may perhaps be freshened for us by the singular intensity with which this metaphor of our text presents it. Look at the picture.—Here stands the solitary man, ringed all round by enemies full of bitter hate. Their arrows are on the string, their bows drawn to the ear. The shafts fly thick, and when they have whizzed past him, and he can be seen again, he stands unharmed, grasping his unbroken bow. The assault has shivered no weapon, has given no wound. He has been able to stand in the evil day—and look! a pair of great, gentle, strong hands are laid upon his hands and arms, and strength passes into his feebleness from the touch of 'the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.' So the enemy have two, not one, to reckon with. By the side of the hunted man stands a mighty figure, and it is His strength, not the mortal's impotence, that has to be overcome. Some dream of such divine help in the struggle of battle has floated through the minds, and been enshrined in the legends, of many people, as when the panoplied Athene has been descried leading the Grecian armies, or, through the dust of conflict, the gleaming armour and white horses of the Twin Brethren were seen far in advance of the armies of Rome. But the dream is for us a reality. It *is* true that we go not to warfare at our own charges, nor by our own strength. If we love Him and try to make a brave stand against our own evil, and to strike a manful blow for God in this world, we shall not have to bear the brunt alone. Remember he who fights for God never fights without God.

There is a strange story in a later book of Scripture, which almost reads as if it had been modelled on some reminiscence of these words of the dying Jacob—and is, at any rate, a remarkable illustration of them. The kingdom of Israel, of which the descendants of Joseph were the most conspicuous part, was in the very crisis and agony of one of its Syrian wars. Its principal human helper was 'fallen sick of the sickness whereof he died.' And to his death-bed came, in a passion of perplexity and despair, the irresolute weakling who was then king, bewailing the impending withdrawal of the nation's best defence. The dying Elisha, with curt authority, pays no heed to the tears of Joash, but bids him take bow and arrows. 'And he said to the king of Israel, Put thine hand upon the bow,' and he put his hand upon it; and '*Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands.*' Then, when the thin, wasted, transparent fingers of the old man were thus laid, guiding and infusing strength, by a strange paradox, into the brown, muscular hands of the young king, he tells him to open the casement that looked eastward towards the lands of the enemy, and, as the blinding sunshine and the warm air streamed into the sick-chamber, he bids him draw the bow. He was obeyed, and, as the arrow whizzed Jordanwards, the dying prophet followed its flight with words brief and rapid like it, 'the arrow of the Lord's deliverance.' Here we have all the elements of our text singularly repeated—the dying seer, the king the representative of Joseph in the royal dignity to which his descendants have come, the arrows and the bow, the strength for conflict by the touch of hands that had the strength of God in them. The lesson of that paradox that the dying gave strength to the living, the feeble to the strong, was the old one which is ever new, that mere human power is weakness when it is strongest, and that power drawn from God is omnipotent when it seems weakest. And the further lesson is the lesson of our text, that our hands are then strengthened, when His hands are laid upon them, of whom it is written: 'Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is Thy hand, and high is Thy right hand.

As a father in old days might have taken his little boy out to the butts, and put a bow into his hand, and given him his first lesson in archery, directing his unsteady aim by his own firmer finger, and lending the strength of his wrist to his child's feebler pull, so God does with us. The sure, strong hand is laid on ours, and is 'profitable to direct.' A wisdom not our own is ever at our side, and ready for our service. We but dimly perceive the conditions of the conflict, and the mark at which we should aim is ever apt to be obscured to our perceptions. But in all cases where conscience is perplexed, or where the judgment is at fault, we may, if we will, have Him for our teacher. And when we know not where to strike the foes that seem invulnerable, like the warrior who was dipped in the magic stream, or clothed in mail impenetrable as rhinoceros' hide, He will make us wise to know the one spot where a wound is fatal. We shall not need to fight as he that beats the air; to strike at random; or to draw our bow at a venture, if we will let Him guide us.

Or if ever the work be seen clearly enough, but our poor hands cannot take aim for very trembling, or shoot for fear of striking something very dear to us, He will steady our nerves and make our aim sure and true. We have often, in our fight with ourselves, and in our struggle to get God's will done in the world, to face as cruel a perplexity as the father who had to split the apple on his son's head. The evil against which we have to contend is often so closely connected with things very precious to us, that it is hard to smite the one when there is such danger of grazing the other. Many a time our tastes, our likings, our prejudices, our hopes, our loves, make our sight dim, and our pulses too tumultuous to allow of a good, long, steady gaze and a certain aim. It is hard to keep the arrow's point firm when the heart throbs and the hand shakes. But in all such difficult times He is ready to help us. 'Behold, we know not what to do, but our eyes are upon Thee,' is a prayer never offered in vain.

The word that is here rendered 'made strong,' might be translated 'made pliable,' or 'flexible,' conveying the notion of deftness and dexterity rather than that of simple strength. It is practised strength that He will give, the educated hand and arm, masters of the manipulation of the weapon. The stiffness and clumsiness of our handling, the obstinate rigidity as well as the throbbing feebleness of our arms, the dimness of our sight, may all be overcome. At His touch the raw recruit is as the disciplined veteran; the prophet who cannot speak because he is a child, gifted with a mouth and wisdom which all the adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor to resist. Do not be disheartened by your inexperience, or by your ignorance; but as the prophet said to the young king, Take the bow and shoot. God's strong hand will hold yours, and the arrow will fly true.

That strong hand is laid on ours, and lends its weight to our feeble pull. The bow is often too heavy for us to bend, but we do not need to strain our strength in the vain attempt to do it alone. Tasks seem too much for us. The pressure of our daily work overwhelms us. The burden of our daily anxieties and sorrows is too much. Some huge obstacle starts up in our path. Some great sacrifice for truth, honour, duty, which we feel we cannot make, is demanded of us. Some daring defiance of some evil, which has caught us in its toils, or which it is unfashionable to fight against, seems laid upon us. We cannot rise to the height of the occasion, or bring ourselves to the wrench that is required. Or the wearing recurrence of monotonous duties seems to take all freshness out of our lives, and all spring out of ourselves; and we are ready to give over struggling any more, and let ourselves drift. Can we not feel that large hand laid on ours; and does not power, more and other than our own, creep into our numb and relaxed fingers? Yes, if we will let Him. His strength is made perfect in our weakness; and every man and woman who will make life a noble struggle against evil, vanity, or sin, may be very sure that God will direct and strengthen their hands to war, and their fingers to fight.

But the remarkable metaphor of the text not only gives the fact of divine strength being bestowed, but also the *manner* of the gift. What a boldness of reverent familiarity there is in that symbol of the hands of God laid on the hands of the man! How strongly it puts the contact between us and Him as the condition of our reception of power from Him! A true touch, as of hand to hand, conveys the grace. It is as when the prophet laid himself down with his warm lip on the dead boy's cold mouth, and his heart beating against the still heart of the corpse, till the life passed into the clay, and the lad lived. So, if we may say it, our Quickener bends Himself over all our deadness, and by His own warmth reanimates us.

Perhaps this same thought is one of the lessons which we are meant to learn from the frequency with which our Lord wrought His miracles of healing by the touch of His hand. 'Come and lay Thy hand on him, and he shall live.' 'And He put forth His hand and touched him, and said, I will, be thou clean.'

'Many said, He is dead; but Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.' The touch of His hand is healing and life. The touch of our hands is faith. In the mystery of His incarnation, in the flow of His sympathy, in the forth-putting of His power, He lays hold not on angels, but He lays hold on the seed of Abraham. By our lowly trust, by the forth-putting of our desires, we stretch 'lame hands of faith,' and, blessed be God! we do not 'grope,' but we grasp His strong hand and are held up.

The contact of our spirits with His Spirit is a contact far more real than the touch of earthly hands that grasp each other closest. There is ever some film of atmosphere between the palms. But 'he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit,' and he that clasps Christ's outstretched hand of help with his outstretched hand of weakness, holds Him with a closeness to which all unions of earth are gaping gulfs of separation. You remember how Mary cast herself at Christ's feet on the resurrection morning, and would have flung her arms round them in the passion of her joy. The calm word which checked her has a wonderful promise in it. 'Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father'; plainly leading to the inference, 'When I am ascended, then you may touch Me.' And that touch will be more reverent, more close, more blessed, than any clasping of His feet, even with such loving hands, and is possible for us all for evermore.

Nothing but such contact will give us strength for conflict and for conquest. And the plain lesson therefore is—see to it, that the contact is not broken by you. Put away the metaphor, and the simple English of the advice is just this:—First, live in the desire and the confidence of His help in all your need, of His strength as all your power. As a part of that confidence—its reverse and under side, so to speak—cherish the profound sense of your own weakness.

> 'In our own strength we nothing can;
> Full soon were we down-ridden'—

as Luther has taught us to sing. Let there be a constant renewal, in the midst of your duties and trials, of that conscious dependence and feeling of insufficiency. Stretch out the empty hands to Him in that desire and hope, which, spoken or silent, is prayer. Keep the communications open, by which His strength flows into your souls. Let them not be choked with self-confidence, with vanities, with the rubbish of your own nature, or of the world. Do not twitch away your hands from under the strong hands that are laid so gently upon them. But let Him cover, direct, cherish, and strengthen your poor fingers till they are strong and nimble for all your work and warfare. If you go into the fight trusting to your own wit and wisdom, to the vigour of your own arm, or the courage of your own heart, that very foolhardy confidence is itself defeat, for it is sin as well as folly, and nothing can come of it but utter collapse and disaster. But if you will only go to your daily fight with yourself and the world, with your hand grasping God's hand, you will be able to 'withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.' The enemies may compass you about like bees, but in the name of the Lord you can destroy them. Their arrows may fly thick enough to darken the sun, but, as the proud old boast has it, 'then we can fight in the shade'; and when their harmless points have buried themselves in the ground, you will stand unhurt, your unshivered bow ready for the next assault, and your hands made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob. 'In all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us.'

THE SHEPHERD, THE STONE OF ISRAEL

'. . . The mighty God of Jacob. From thence is the Shepherd, the stone of Israel.'—GENESIS xlix. 24.

A SLIGHT alteration in the rendering will probably bring out the meaning of these words more correctly. The last two clauses should perhaps not be read as a separate sentence. Striking out the supplement 'is,' and letting the previous sentence run on to the end of the verse, we get a series of names of God, in apposition with each other, as the sources of the strength promised to the arms of the hands of the warlike sons of Joseph. From the hands of the mighty God of Jacob—from thence, from the Shepherd, the stone of Israel—the power will come for conflict and for conquest. This exuberant heaping together of names of God is the mark of the flash of rapturous confidence which lit up the dying man's thoughts when they turned to God. When he begins to think of Him he cannot stay his tongue. So many aspects of His character, so many remembrances of His deeds, come crowding into his mind; so familiar and so dear are they, that he must linger over the words, and strive by this triple repetition to express the manifold preciousness of Him whom no name, nor crowd of names, can rightly praise. So earthly love ever does with its earthly objects, inventing and reiterating epithets which are caresses. Such repetitions are not tautologies, for each utters some new aspect of the one subject, and comes from a new gush of heart's love towards it. And something of the same rapture and unwearied recurrence to the Name that is above every name should mark the communion of devout souls with their heavenly Love. What a wonderful burst of such praise flowed out from David's thankful heart, in his day of deliverance, like some strong current, with its sevenfold wave, each crested with the Name—'The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer: my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.'

These three names which we find here are striking and beautiful in themselves; in their juxtaposition; in their use on Jacob's lips. They seem to have been all coined by him, for, if we accept this song as a true prophecy uttered by him, we have here the earliest instance of their occurrence. They all have a history, and appear again expanded and deepened in the subsequent revelation. Let us look at them as they stand.

1. *The Mighty God of Jacob.*—The meaning of such a name is clear enough. It is He who has shown Himself mighty and mine by His deeds for me all through my life. The dying man's thoughts are busy with all that past from the day when he went forth from the tent of Isaac, and took of the stones of the field for his pillow when the sun went down. A perplexed history it had been, with many a bitter sorrow, and many a yet bitterer sin. Passionate grief and despairing murmurs he had felt and flung out, while it slowly unfolded itself. When the Pharaoh

had asked, 'How old art thou?' he had answered in words which owe their sombreness partly to obsequious assumption of insignificance in such a presence, but have a strong tinge of genuine sadness in them too: 'Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.' But lying dying there, with it all well behind him, he has become wiser; and now it all looks to him as one long showing forth of the might of his God, who had been with him all his life long, and had redeemed him from all evil. He has got far enough away to see the lie of the land, as he could not do while he was toiling along the road. The barren rocks and white snow glow with purple as the setting sun touches them. The struggles with Laban; the fear of Esau; the weary work of toilsome years; the sad day when Rachel died, and left to him the 'son of her sorrow'; the heart sickness of the long years of Joseph's loss—all have faded away, or been changed into thankful wonder at God's guidance. The one thought which the dying man carries out of life with him is: God has shown Himself mighty, and He has shown Himself mine.

For each of us, our own experience should be a revelation of God. The things about Him which we read in the Bible are never living and real to us till we have verified them in the facts of our own history. Many a word lies on the page, or in our memories, fully believed and utterly shadowy, until in some soul's conflict we have had to grasp it, and found it true. Only so much of our creed as we have proved in life is really ours. If we will only open our eyes and reflect upon our history as it passes before us, we shall find every corner of it filled with the manifestations to our hearts and to our minds of a present

God. But our folly, our stupidity, our impatience, our absorption with the mere outsides of things, our self-will, blind us to the Angel with the drawn sword who resists us, as well as to the Angel with the lily who would lead us. So we waste our days; are deaf to His voice speaking through all the clatter of tongues, and blind to His bright presence shining through all the dimness of earth; and, for far too many of us, we never can see God in the present, but only discern Him when He has passed by, like Moses from his cleft. Like this same Jacob, we have to say: 'Surely God was in this place, and I knew it not.' Hence we miss the educational worth of our lives, are tortured with needless cares, are beaten by the poorest adversaries, and grope amidst what seems to us a chaos of pathless perplexities, when we might be marching on assured and strong, with God for our guide, and the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob for our defence.

Notice, too, how distinctly the thought comes out in this name—that the very vital centre of a man's religion is his conviction that God is his. Jacob will not be content with thinking of God as the God of his fathers; he will not even be content with associating himself with them in the common possession; but he must feel the full force of the intensely personal bond that knits him to God, and God to him. Of course such a feeling does not ignore the blessed fellowship and family who also are held in this bond. The God of Jacob is to the patriarch also the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob. But that comes second, and this comes first. Each man for himself must put forth the hand of his own faith, and grasp that great hand for his own guide. '*My*

Lord and *my* God' is the true form of the confession. 'He loved *me* and gave Himself for *me*,' is the shape in which the Gospel of Christ melts the soul. God is mine because His love individualises me, and I have a distinct place in His heart, His purposes, and His deeds. God is mine, because by my own individual act—the most personal which I can perform—I cast myself on Him, by my faith appropriate the common salvation, and open my being to the inflow of His power. God is mine, and I am His, in that wonderful mutual possession, with perpetual interchange of giving and receiving not only gifts but selves, which makes the very life of love, whether it be love on earth or love in heaven.

Remember, too, the profound use which our Lord made of this name, wherein Jacob claims to possess God. Because Moses at the bush called God, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, they cannot have ceased to be. The personal relations, which subsist between God and the soul that clasps Him for its own, demand an immortal life for their adequate expression, and make it impossible that Death's skeleton fingers should have power to untie such a bond. Anything is conceivable, rather than that the soul which can say 'God is mine' should perish. And that continued existence demands, too, a state of being which shall correspond to itself, in which its powers shall all be exercised, its desires fulfilled, its possibilities made facts. Therefore there must be the resurrection. 'God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He hath prepared for them a city.'

The dying patriarch left to his descendants the legacy of this great name, and often, in later times, it was used to quicken faith by the remembrance of the great deeds of God in the past. One instance may serve as a sample of the whole. 'The Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge.' The first of these two names lays the foundation of our confidence in the thought of the boundless power of Him whom all the forces of the universe, personal and impersonal, angels and stars, in their marshalled order, obey and serve. The second bids later generations claim as theirs all that the old history reveals as having belonged to the 'world's grey fathers.' They had no special prerogative of nearness or of possession. The arm that guided them is unwearied, and all the past is true still, and will for evermore be true for all who love God. So the venerable name is full of promise and of hope for us: 'The God of Jacob is our refuge.'

2. *The Shepherd.*—How that name sums up the lessons that Jacob had learned from the work of himself and of his sons! 'Thy servants are shepherds,' they said to Pharaoh; 'both we, and also our sons.' For fourteen long, weary years he had toiled at that task. 'In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes,' and his own sleepless vigilance and patient endurance seem to him to be but shadows of the loving care, the watchful protection, the strong defence, which 'the God, who has been my Shepherd all my life long,' had extended to him and his. Long before the shepherd king, who had been taken from the sheepcotes to rule over Israel, sang his immortal psalm, the same occupation had suggested the same thought to the shepherd patriarch. Happy they whose daily work may picture for them some aspect of God's care—or rather, happy they whose eyes are

open to see the dim likeness of God's care which every man's earthly relations, and some part of his work, most certainly present.

There can be no need to draw out at length the thoughts which that sweet and familiar emblem has conveyed to so many generations. Loving care, wise guidance, fitting food, are promised by it; and docile submission, close following at the Shepherd's heels, patience, innocence, meekness, trust, are required. But I may put emphasis for a moment on the connection between the thought of 'the mighty God of Jacob' and that of 'the Shepherd.' The occupation, as we see it, does not call for a strong arm, or much courage, except now and then to wade through snow-drifts, and dig out the buried and half-dead creatures. But the shepherds whom Jacob knew, had to be hardy, bold fighters. There were marauders lurking ready to sweep away a weakly guarded flock. There were wild beasts in the gorges of the hills. There was danger in the sun by day on these burning plains, and in the night the wolves prowled round the flock. We remember how David's earliest exploits were against the lion and the bear, and how he felt that even his duel with the Philistine bully was not more formidable than these had been. If we will read into our English notions of a shepherd this element of danger and of daring, we shall feel that these two clauses are not to be taken as giving the contrasted ideas of strength and gentleness, but the connected ones of strength, and therefore protection and security. We have the same connection in later echoes of this name. 'Behold, the Lord God shall come with *strong* hand; He shall feed His flock like a shepherd.' And our Lord's use of the figure brings into all but exclusive prominence the good shepherd's conflict with the ravening wolves—a conflict in which he must not hesitate even 'to lay down his life for the sheep.' As long as the flock are here, amidst dangers and foes, and wild weather, the arm that guides must be an arm that can guard; and none less mighty than the Mighty One of Jacob can be the Shepherd of men. But a higher fulfilment yet awaits this venerable emblem, when in other pastures, where no lion nor any ravening beast shall come, the 'Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne,' and is Shepherd as well as Lamb, 'shall feed them, and lead them by living fountains of waters.'

3. *The Stone of Israel.*—Here, again, we have a name, that after-ages have caught up and cherished, used for the first time. I suppose the Stone of Israel means much the same thing as the Rock. If so, that symbol, too, which is full of such large meanings, was coined by Jacob. It is, perhaps, not fanciful to suppose that it owes its origin to the scenery of Palestine. The wild cliffs of the eastern region where Peniel lay, or the savage fastnesses in the southern wilderness, a day's march from Hebron, where he lived so long, came back to his memory amid the flat, clay land of Egypt; and their towering height, their immovable firmness, their cool shade, their safe shelter, spoke to him of the unalterable might and impregnable defence which he had found in God. So there is in this name the same devout, reflective laying-hold upon experience which we have observed in the preceding.

There is also the same individualising grasp of God as his very own; for 'Israel' here is, of course, to be taken not as the name of the nation but as his own name, and the intention of the phrase is evidently to express what God had been to him personally.

The general idea of this symbol is perhaps firmness, solidity. And that general idea may be followed out in various details. God is a rock for a foundation. Build your lives, your thoughts, your efforts, your hopes there. The house founded on the rock will stand though wind and rain from above smite it, and floods from beneath beat on it like battering-rams. God is a rock for a fortress. Flee to Him to hide, and your defence shall be the 'munitions of rocks,' which shall laugh to scorn all assault, and never be stormed by any foe. God is a rock for shade and refreshment. Come close to Him from out of the scorching heat, and you will find coolness and verdure and moisture in the clefts, when all outside that grateful shadow is parched and dry.

The word of the dying Jacob was caught up by the great law-giver in his dying song. 'Ascribe ye greatness to our God. He is the Rock.' It reappears in the last words of the shepherd king, whose grand prophetic picture of the true King is heralded by 'The Rock of Israel spake to me.' It is heard once more from the lips of the greatest of the prophets in his glowing prophecy of the song of the final days: 'Trust ye in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord Jehovah is the Rock of Ages,' as well as in his solemn prophecy of the Stone which God would lay in Zion. We hear it again from the lips that cannot lie: 'Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The Stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head-stone of the corner?' And for the last time the venerable metaphor which has cheered so many ages appears in the words of that Apostle who was 'surnamed Cephas, which is by interpretation a stone': 'To whom coming as unto a living Stone, ye also as living stones are built up.' As on some rocky site in Palestine, where a hundred generations in succession have made their fortresses, one may see stones with the bevel that tells of early Jewish masonry, and above them Roman work, and higher still masonry of crusading times, and above it the building of to-day; so we, each age in our turn, build on this great rock foundation, dwell safe there for our little lives, and are laid to peaceful rest in a sepulchre in the rock. On Christ we may build. In Him we may dwell and rest secure. We may die in Jesus, and be gathered to our own people, who, having died, live in Him. And though so many generations have reared their dwellings on that great rock, there is ample room for us too to build. We have not to content ourselves with an uncertain foundation among the shifting rubbish of perished dwellings, but can get down to the firm virgin rock for ourselves. None that ever builded there have been confounded. We clasp hands with all who have gone before us. At one end of the long chain this dim figure of the dying Jacob, amid the strange vanished life of Egypt, stretches out his withered hands to God the Stone of Israel; at the other end, we lift up ours to Jesus, and cry:—

> 'Rock of Ages! cleft for me,
> Let me hide myself in Thee.'

The faith is one. One will be the answer and the reward. May it be yours and mine!

A CALM EVENING, PROMISING A BRIGHT MORNING

> 'And Joseph returned into Egypt, he, and his brethren, and all that went up with him to bury his father, after he had buried his father. And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him. And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying, So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him. And his brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold, we be thy servants. And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them. And Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he, and his father's house: and Joseph lived an hundred and ten years. And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation: the children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were brought up upon Joseph's knees. And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence. So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.'—GENESIS l. 14-26.

JOSEPH'S brothers were right in thinking that he loved Jacob better than he did them; and they knew only too well that he had reasons for doing so. But their fear that Jacob's death would be followed by an outbreak of long-smothered revenge betrayed but too clearly their own base natures. They thought him like themselves, and they knew themselves capable of nursing wrath to keep it warm through long years of apparent kindliness. They had no room in their hearts for frank, full forgiveness. So they had lived on through numberless signs of their brother's love and care, and still kept the old dread, and, probably, not a little of the old envy. How much happiness they had lost by their slowness to believe in Joseph's love!

Is there nothing like this in our thoughts of God? Do men not live for years on His bounty, and all the while cherish suspicions of His heart? 'Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself.' It is hard to believe in a love which has no faintest trace of desire for vengeance for all past slights. It is hard for hearts conscious of their own slowness to pardon, to realise undoubtingly God's infinite placability.

The brothers' procedure is marked by unwarrantable lack of trust in Joseph. Why did they not go to him at once, and appeal to his brotherly affection? Their roundabout way of going to work by sending a messenger was an insult to their brother, though it may have been meant as honour to the viceroy. The craft which was their father's by nature seems to have been amply transmitted. The story of Jacob's dying wish looks very apocryphal. If he had been afraid of Joseph's behaviour when he was gone, he was much more likely to have spoken to Joseph about it before he went, than to have left the gun loaded and bid them fire it after his death. Jacob knew his son better, and trusted him more than his brothers did.

We note, too, the ingenious way of slipping in motives for forgiving, first in putting the mention of their relationship into Jacob's mouth, and then claiming to be worshippers of 'thy (not our) father's God.' They had proved how truly they were both, when they sold him to the Midianites!

Joseph's tears were a good answer. No doubt they were partly drawn out by the shock of finding that he had been so misunderstood, but they were omens of his pardon. So, when they were reported to the brothers, they came themselves, and fulfilled the old dream by falling down before him in abjectness. They do not call themselves his brethren, but his slaves, as if grovelling was the way to win love or to show it. A little affection would have gone farther than much submission. If their attitude truly expressed their feelings, their hearts were as untouched by Joseph's years of magnanimous kindness as a rock by falling rain. If it was a theatrical display of feigned subjection, it was still worse. Our Brother, against whom we have sinned, wants love, not cowering; and if we believe in His forgiveness, we shall give Him the hearts which He desires, and after that shall render the unconditional submission which only trust and love can yield.

Joseph's answer is but the reiteration of his words at his first making himself known. He soothes unworthy fears, says not a word of reproach for their misunderstanding of him, waives all pretension to deal out that retribution which God alone sends, and shows that he has lost all bitterness in thinking of the past, since he sees in it, not the working of their malice, but of God's providence, and is ready to thank, if not them, at any rate Him, for having, by even so painful a way, made him the instrument of widespread good. A man who sees God's hand in his past, and thinks lightly of his sorrows and nobly of the opportunities of service which they have brought him, will waste no feeling on the men who were God's tools. If we want to live high above low hatreds and revenges, let us cultivate the habit of looking behind men to God. So we shall be saved from many fruitless pangs over irrevocable losses and from many disturbing feelings about other people.

The sweet little picture of the great minister's last days is very tenderly touched. Surrounded by his kindred, probably finding in a younger generation the reverence and affection which the elder had failed to give, he wears away the calm evening of the life which had opened so stormily. It 'came in like a lion, it goes out like a lamb.' The strong domestic instincts so characteristic of the Hebrew race had full gratification. Honours and power at court and kingdom probably continued, but these did not make the genial warmth which cheered the closing years. It was that he saw his children's children's children, and that they gathered round his knees in confidence, and received from him his benediction.

But it is in his death that the flame shoots up most brightly at the last. 'By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.' He had been an Egyptian to all appearance all his life from the day of his captivity, filling his place at court, marrying an Egyptian woman, and bearing an Egyptian name, but his dying words show how he had been a stranger in the midst of it all. As truly as his fathers who dwelt in tents, he too felt that he here had no continuing city. He lived by faith in God's promises, and therefore his heart was in the unseen future far more than in the present.

He died with the ancestral assurance on his lips. Jacob, dying, had said to him, 'Behold, I die; but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers' (Gen. xlviii. 21). Joseph hands on the hope to his descendants. It is a grand instance of indomitable confidence in God's word, not nonplussed, bewildered, or weakened, though the man who cherishes it dies without seeing even a beginning of fulfilment. Such a faith bridges the gulf of death as a very small matter. In the strength of it we may drop our unfinished tasks, and, needful as we may seem to wider or narrower circles, may be sure that God and His word live, though we die. No man is necessary. Israel was safe in Egypt, and sure to come out of it, though Joseph's powerful protection was withdrawn.

His career may teach another lesson; namely, that true faith does not detach us from strenuous interest and toil in the present. Though the great hope burned in his heart, he did all his work as prime minister all the better because of it. It should always be so. Life here is not worth living if there is not another. The distance dignifies the foreground. The highest importance and nobleness of the life that now is, lie in its being preparation or apprenticeship for the greater future. The Egyptian vizier, with Canaan written on his heart, and Egypt administered by his hands, is a type of what every Christian should be.

Possibly Joseph's 'commandment concerning his bones' may have been somewhat influenced by the Egyptian belief which underlies their practice of embalming the body. He, too, may have thought that, in some mysterious way, he would share in the possession of the land in which his bones were to be laid. Or he may simply have been yielding to natural sentiment. It is noteworthy that Jacob desired to be laid beside his ancestors, and Joseph to be kept in Egypt for a time. Both had the same assurance as to future possession of Canaan, but it led to different wishes as to burial. Perhaps Joseph felt that his position in Egypt required that his embalmed body should for a while remain there. Perhaps he wished to leave with his people a silent witness of his own hope, and a preacher, eloquent in its dumbness, of the duty of their keeping alive that hope, whatever might come upon them.

'In a coffin in Egypt'—so the book ends. It might seem that that mummy-case proclaimed rather the futility of the hope of restoration to the land, and, as centuries rolled away, and the bondage became heavier, no doubt many a wondering and doubting look was turned to it. But there it lay, perhaps neglected, for more than three hundred years, the visible embodiment of a hope which smiled at death and counted centuries as nothing. At last the day came which vindicated the long-deferred confidence; and, as the fugitives in their haste shouldered the heavy sarcophagus, and set out with it for the Land of Promise, surely some thrill of trust would pass through their ranks, and in some hearts would sound the exhortation, 'If the vision tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.'

We have not a dead Joseph to bid us wait with patience and never lose our firm grip of God's promises, but we have a living Jesus. Our march to the land of rest is headed, not by the bones of a departed leader, but by the Forerunner, 'who is for us entered' whither He will bring all who trust in Him. Therefore we should live, as Joseph lived, with desires and trust reaching out beyond things seen to the land assured to us by God's promise, doing our day's task all the more vigorously because we do not belong to the order of things in the midst of which we live; and then, when we lie down at the end of our life's work, we shall not be saddened by disappointed hopes, nor reluctantly close our eyes on good to come, when we shall not be there to share it, but be sure that we shall 'see the good of Thy chosen,' and 'rejoice in the gladness of Thy nation.

JOSEPH'S FAITH

'Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence.'—GENESIS l. 25.

THIS is the one act of Joseph's life which the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews selects as the sign that he too lived by faith. 'By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.'

It was at once a proof of how entirely he believed God's promise, and of how earnestly he longed for its fulfilment. It was a sign too of how little he felt himself at home in Egypt, though to outward appearance he had become completely one of its people. The ancestral spirit was in him true and strong though he was 'separate from his brethren.' He bore an Egyptian name, a swelling title, he married an Egyptian woman, he had an Egyptian priest for father-in-law, but he was an Israelite in heart; and in the midst of official cares and a surfeit of honours, his desires turned away from them all towards the land promised by God to his fathers.

And when he lay dying, he could not bear to think that his bones should moulder in the country where his life had been spent. 'I know that this is not our land after all; swear to me that when the promise that has tarried so long comes at last, you will take me, all that is left of me, and carry it up, and lay it in some corner of the blessed soil, that I too may somehow share in the inheritance of His people. God shall surely visit you. Carry my bones up hence.'

Perhaps there is in this wish a trace of something besides faith in God's promises. Of course, there is a natural sentiment which no clearness of knowledge of a future state wholly dispels. We all feel as if somehow our bodies remain a part of ourselves even after death, and we have wishes where they shall lie. But perhaps Joseph had a more definite belief on the matter than that. What theory of another life does an Egyptian mummy express? Why all that sedulous care to preserve the poor relics? Was it not a consequence of the belief that somehow or other there could be no life without a body, and that in some mysterious way the preservation of that contributed to the continuance of this? And so Joseph, who was himself going to be embalmed and put into a mummy-case, may have caught something of the tone of thought prevalent around him, and have believed that to carry his bones to the land of promise was, in some obscure manner, to carry *him* thither. Be that as it may, whether the wish came from a mistake about the relation of flesh and spirit, or only from the natural desire which we too possess, that our graves may not be among strangers, but beside our father's and our mother's—that is not the main thing in this fact. The main thing is that this dying man believed God's promise, and claimed his share in it.

And on this the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, whoever he was, fastens. Neglecting the differences in knowledge between Joseph and the Christians whom he addresses, and pointing back to the strong confidence in God and longing for participation in the promises which brightened the glazing eye and gave *him* 'hope in his death,' he declares that the principle of action which guided this man in the dim twilight of early revelation, is that same faith which ought to guide us who live in the full light of the unsetting sun.

Taking, then, this incident, with the New Testament commentary upon it, it leads us to a truth which we often lose sight of, but which is indispensable if we would understand the relations of the earlier and later days.

1. *Faith is always the same, though knowledge varies.* —There is a vast difference between a man's creed and a man's faith. The one may vary, does vary within very wide limits; the other remains the same. The things believed have been growing from the beginning—the attitude of mind and will by which they have been grasped has been the same from the beginning, and will be the same to the end. And not only so, but it will be substantially the same in heaven as it is on earth. For there is but one bond which unites men to God; and that emotion of loving trust is one and the same in the dim twilight of the world's morning, and amid the blaze of the noonday of heaven. The contents of faith, that on which it relies, the treasure it grasps, changes; the essence of faith, the act of reliance, the grasp which holds the treasure. does not change.

It is difficult to decide how much Joseph's gospel contained. From our point of view it was very imperfect. The spiritual life was nourished in him and in the rest of 'the world's grey fathers' on what looks to us but like seven basketsful of fragments. They had promises, indeed, in which we, looking at them with the light of fulfilment blazing upon them, can see the broad outlines of the latest revelation, and can trace the future flower all folded together and pale in the swelling bud. But we shall err greatly if we suppose, as we are apt to do, that these promises were to them anything like what they are to us. It requires a very vigorous exercise of very rare gifts to throw ourselves back to their position, and to gain any vivid and approximately accurate notion of the theology of these ancient lovers of God.

This, at any rate, we may, perhaps, say: they had a sure and clear knowledge of the living God, who had talked with them as with a friend; they knew His inspiring, guiding presence; they knew the forgiveness of sins; they knew, though they very dimly understood, the promise, 'In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' How far they looked across the gulf of death and beheld anything—even cloudland—on the other side, is a question very hard to answer, and about which confident dogmatism, either affirmative or negative, is unwarranted. But it is to be remembered that, whether they had any notion of a future state or no, they had a promise which fulfilled for them substantially the same office as that does for us. The promise of the land of Canaan gleaming before them through the mists, bare and 'earthly' as it seems to us when compared with our hope of an inheritance incorruptible in the heavens, is, by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, identified with that hope of ours, for he expressly says that, whilst they were looking for an earthly Canaan, they were 'desiring a better country, that is an heavenly.' So that, whether they definitely expected a life after death or not, the anticipation of the land promised to them and to their fathers held the same place in their creed, and as a moral agent in their lives, which the rest that remains for the people of God ought to do in ours.

And it is to be taken into account also that fellowship with God has in it the germ of the assurance of immortality. It seems almost impossible to suppose a state of mind in which a man living in actual communion with God shall believe that death is to end it all. Christ's proof that immortal life was revealed in the Pentateuch, was the fact that God there called Himself the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob; by which our Lord meant us to learn that men who are brought into personal relations with God can never die, that it is impossible that a soul which has looked up to the face of the unseen Father with filial love should be left in the grave, or that those who are separated to be His, as He is theirs, should see corruption. The relation once established is eternal, and some more or less definite expectation of that eternity seems inseparable from the consciousness of the relation.

But be that as it may, and even taking the widest possible view of the contents of the patriarchal creed, what a rude outline it looks beside ours! Can there be anything in common between us? Can they be in any way a pattern for us? Yes; as I said, faith is one thing, creed is another. Joseph and his ancestors were joined to God by the very same bond which unites us to Him. There has never been but one path of life: 'They *trusted* God and were lightened, and their faces were not ashamed.' In that Old Covenant the one thing needful was trust in the living Jehovah. In the New, the one thing needful is the very same emotion, directed to the very same Lord, manifested now and incarnate in the divine Son, our Saviour. In this exercise of loving confidence, in which reason and will and affection blend in the highest energy and holiest action, Joseph and we are one. Across the gulf of centuries we clasp hands; and in despite of all superficial differences of culture and civilisation, and all deeper differences in knowledge of God and His loving will, Pharaoh's prime minister, and the English workman, and the Hindoo ryot, may be alike in what is deepest—the faith which grasps God. How all that mysterious Egyptian life fades away as we think of the fundamental identity of religious emotion then and now! It disguises our brother from us, as it did from the wandering Arabs who came to buy corn, and could not recognise in the swarthy, imperious Egyptian, with strange head-dress and unknown emblems hanging by chains of gold about his neck, the fair boy whom they had sold to the merchants. But beneath it all is the brother's heart, fed by the same life-blood which feeds ours. He trusts in God he expects a future because God has promised it, and, therefore, he is separated from those among whom he dwells, and knit to us in this far-off island of the sea, who so many centuries after are partakers of like precious faith.

And incomplete as his creed was, Joseph may have been a better Christian than some of us, and was so, if what he knew nourished his spiritual life more than what we know nourishes ours, and if his heart and will twined more tenaciously round the fragments of revelation which he possessed, and drew from them more support and strength than we do from the complete Gospel which we have.

Brethren, what makes us Christians is not the theology we have in our heads, but the faith and love we have in our hearts. We must, indeed, have a clear statement of truth in orderly propositions—that is, a system of dogmas—to have anything to trust to at all. There can be no saving faith in an unseen Person, except through the medium of thoughts concerning Him, which thoughts put into words are a creed. The antithesis which is often eagerly urged upon us—not doctrines, but Christ—is a very incomplete and misleading one. 'Christ' is a mere name, empty of all significance till it is filled with definite statements of who and what Christ is. But whilst I, for my part, believe that we must have doctrines to make Christ a reality and an object of faith to grasp at all, I would urge all the more earnestly, because I thus believe, that, when we have these doctrines, it is not the creed that saves, but the faith. We are united to Christ, not by the doctrine of His nature and work, needful as that is, but by trusting in Him as that which the doctrine declares Him to be—Redeemer, Friend, Sacrifice, Divine Lover of our souls. Let us always remember that it is not the amount of religious knowledge which I have got, but the amount which I use, that determines my religious position and character. Most of us have in our creeds principles that have no influence upon our moral and active life; and, if so, it matters not one whit how pure, how accurate, how comprehensive, how consistent, how scriptural my conceptions of the Gospel may be. If they are not powers in my soul, they only increase my responsibility and my liability to condemnation. The dry light of the understanding is of no use to anybody. You must turn your creed into a faith before it has power to bless and save.

There are hosts of so-called Christians who get no more good out of the most solemn articles of their orthodox belief than if they were heathens. What is the use of your saying that you believe in God the Father Almighty, when there is no child's love and happy confidence in your heart? What the better are you for believing in Jesus Christ, His divine nature, His death and glory, when you have no reliance on Him, nor any least flutter of trembling love towards Him? Is your belief in the Holy Ghost of the smallest consequence, if you do not yield to His hallowing power? What does it matter that you believe in the forgiveness of sins, so long as you do not care a rush whether yours are pardoned or no? And is it anything to you or to God that you believe in the life everlasting, if all your work, and hopes, and longings are confined to 'this bank and shoal of time'? Are you any more a Christian because of all that intellectual assent to these solemn verities? Is not your life like some secularised monastic chamber, with holy texts carved on the walls, and saintly images looking down from glowing windows on revellers and hucksters who defile its floor? Your faith, not your creed, determines your religion. Many a 'true believer' is a real 'infidel.'

Thank God that the soul may be wedded to Christ, even while a very partial conception of Christ is in the understanding. The more complete and adequate the creed, indeed, the mightier and more fruitful in blessing will the faith naturally be; and every portion of the full orb of the Sun of Righteousness which is eclipsed by the shadow of our intellectual misconceptions, will diminish the light and warmth which falls upon our souls. It is no part of our duty to pronounce what is the minimum of a creed which faith needs for its object. For myself, I confess that I do not understand how the spiritual life can be sustained in its freshness and fervour, in its fulness and reality, without a belief in the divinity and saving work of Jesus Christ. But with that belief for the centre which faith grasps, the rest may vary indefinitely. All who stand around that centre, some nearer, some further off, some mazed in errors which others have cast behind them, some of them seeing and understanding more, and some less of Him and of His work—are His. He loves them, and will save them all. Knowledge varies. The faith which unites to God remains the same.

2. We may gather from this incident another consideration, namely, that *Faith has its noblest office in detaching from the present.*

All his life long, from the day of his captivity, Joseph was an Egyptian in outward seeming. He filled his place at Pharaoh's court, but his dying words open a window into his soul, and betray how little he had felt that he belonged to the order of things in the midst of which he had been content to live. This man, too, surrounded by an ancient civilisation, and dwelling among granite temples and solid pyramids and firm-based sphinxes, the very emblems of eternity, confessed that here he had no continuing city, but sought one to come. As truly as his ancestors who dwelt in tabernacles, like Abraham journeying with his camels and herds, and pitching his tent outside the walls of Hebron, like Isaac in the grassy plains of the South country, like Jacob keeping himself apart from the families of the land, their descendant, an heir with them of the same promise, showed that he too regarded himself as a 'stranger and a sojourner.' Dying, he said, 'Carry my bones up from hence. Therefore we may be sure that, living, the hope of the inheritance must have burned in his heart as a hidden light, and made him an alien everywhere but on its blessed soil.

And faith will always produce just such effects. In exact proportion to its strength, that living trust in God will direct our thoughts and desires to the 'King in His beauty, and the land that is very far off.' In proportion as our thoughts and desires are thus directed, they will be averted from what is round about us; and the more longingly our eyes are fixed on the furthest horizon, the less shall we see the flowers at our feet. To behold God pales the otherwise dazzling lustre of created brightness. They whose souls are fed with heavenly manna, and who have learned that it is their necessary food, will scent no dainties in the fleshpots of Egypt, for all their rank garlic and leeks. It is simply a question as to which of two classes of ideas occupies the thoughts, and which of two sets of affections engages the heart. If vulgar brawling and rude merrymakers fill the inn, there will be no room for the pilgrim thoughts which bear the Christ in their bosom, and have angels for their guard; and if these holy wayfarers enter, their serene presence will drive forth the noisy crowd, and turn the place into a temple. Nothing but Christian faith gives to the furthest future the solidity and definiteness which it must have, if it is to be a breakwater for us against the fluctuating sea of present cares and thoughts.

If the unseen is ever to rule in men's lives, it must be through their thoughts. It must become intelligible, clear, real. It must be brought out of the flickering moonlight of fancy and surmises, into the sunlight of certitude and knowledge. Dreams, and hopes, and peradventures are too unsubstantial stuff to be a bulwark against the very real, undeniable present. And such certitude is given through faith which grasps the promises of God, and twines the soul round the risen Saviour so closely that it sits with Him in heavenly places. Such certitude is given by faith alone.

If the unseen is ever to rule in men's lives, it must become not only an object for certain knowledge, but also for ardent wishes. The vague sense of possible evils lurking in its mysteries must be taken out of the soul, and there must come somehow an assurance that all it wraps in its folds is joy and peace. It must cease to be doubtful, and must seem infinitely desirable. Does anything but Christian faith engage the heart to love, and all the longing wishes to set towards, the things that are unseen and eternal? Where besides, then, can there be found a counterpoise weighty enough to heave up the souls that are laden with the material, and cleaving to the dust? Nowhere. The only possible deliverance from the tyrannous pressure of the trifles amidst which we live is in having the thoughts familiarised with Christ in heaven, which will dwarf all that is on earth, and in having the affections fixed on Him, which will emancipate them from the pains and sorrows that ever wait upon love of the mutable and finite creatures.

Let us remember that such deliverance from the present is the condition of all noble, joyous, pure life. It needs Christianity to effect it indeed, but it does not need Christianity to see how desirable it is, and how closely connected with whatever is lovely and of good report is this detachment from the near and the visible. A man that is living for remote objects is, in so far, a better man than one who is living for the present. He will become thereby the subject of a mental and moral discipline that will do him good. And, on the other hand, a life which has no far-off light for its guiding star, has none of the unity, of the self-restraint, of the tension, of the conscious power which makes our days noble and strong. Whether he accomplish them or fail, whether they be high or low, the man who lets future objects rule present action is in advance of others. 'To scorn delights and live laborious days,' which is the prerogative of the man with a future, is always best. He is rather a beast than a man, who floats lazily on the warm, sunny wavelets as they lift him in their roll, and does not raise his head high enough above them to see and steer for the solid shore where they break. But only he has found the full, controlling, blessing, quickening power that lies in the thought of the future, and in life directed by it, to whom that future is all summed in the name of his Saviour. Whatever makes a man live in the past and in the future raises him; but high above all others stand those to whom the past is an apocalypse of God, with Calvary for its centre, and all the future is fellowship with Christ, and joy in the heavens. Having these hopes, it will be our own faults if we are not pure and gentle, calm in changes and sorrows, armed against frowning dangers, and proof against smiling temptations. They are our armour—'Put on the breastplate of faith . . . and for an helmet the hope of salvation.'

A very sharp test for us all lies in these thoughts. This change of the centre of interest from earth to heaven is the uniform effect of faith. What, then, of us? On Sundays we profess to seek for a city; but what about the week, from Monday morning to Saturday night? What difference does our faith make in the current of our lives? How far are they unlike—I do not mean externally and in occupations, but in principle—the lives of men who 'have no hope'? Are you living for other objects than theirs? Are you nurturing other hopes in your hearts, as a man may guard a little spark of fire with both his hands, to light him amid the darkness and the howling storm? Do you care to detach yourself from the world? or are you really 'men of this world, which have their portion in this life,' even while Christians by profession? A question which I have no right to ask, and no power to answer but for myself; a question which it concerns your souls to ask and to answer very definitely for yourselves. There is no need to preach an exaggerated and impossible abstinence from work and enjoyment in the world where God has put us, or to set up a standard 'too high for mortal life beneath the sky.' Whatever call there may have sometimes been to protest against a false asceticism, and withdrawing from active life for the sake of one's personal salvation, times are changed now. What we want to-day is: 'Come ye out and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing.' In my conscience I believe that multitudes are having the very heart of the Christian life eaten out by absorption in earthly pursuits and loves, and by the effacing of all distinction in outward life, in occupation, in recreation, in tastes and habits, between people who call themselves Christians, and people who do not care at all whether there is another world or not. There can be but little strength in our faith if it does not compel us to separation. If it has any power to do anything at all, it will certainly do that. If we are naturalised as citizens there, we cannot help being aliens here. 'Abraham,' says the New Testament. 'dwelt in tabernacles, *for* he looked for a city.' Just so! The tent life will always be the natural one for those who feel that their mother-country is beyond the stars. We should be like the wandering Swiss, who hear in a strange land the rude, old melody that used to echo among the Alpine pastures. The sweet, sad tones kindle home-sickness that will not let them rest. No matter where they are, or what they are doing, no matter what honour they have carved out for themselves with their swords, they throw off the livery of the alien king which they have worn, and turning their backs upon pomp and courts, seek the free air of the mountains, and find home better than a place by a foreign throne. Let us esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, and go forth to Him without the camp, for here have we no continuing city.

3. Again, we have here an instance that *Faith makes men energetic in the duties of the present.*

The remarks which I have been making must be completed by that consideration, or they become hurtful and one-sided. You know that common sarcasm, that Christianity degrades this present life by making it merely the portal to a better, and teaches men to think of it as only evil, to be scrambled through anyhow. I confess that I wish the sneer were a less striking contrast to what Christian people really think. But it is almost as gross a caricature of the teaching of Christianity as it is of the practice of Christians.

Take this story of Joseph as giving us a truer view of the effect on present action of faith in, and longing for, God's future. He was, as I said, a true Hebrew all his days. But that did not make him run away from Pharaoh's service. He lived by hope, and that made him the better worker in the passing moment, and kept him tugging away all his life at the oar, administering the affairs of a kingdom.

Of course it is so. The one thing which saves this life from being contemptible is the thought of another. The more profoundly we feel the reality of the great eternity whither we are being drawn, the greater do all things here become. They are made less in their power to absorb or trouble, but they are made infinitely greater in importance as preparations for what is beyond. When they are first they are small, when they are second they are great. When the mist lifts, and shows the snowy summits of the 'mountains of God,' the nearer lower ranges, which we thought the highest, dwindle indeed, but gain in sublimity and meaning by the loftier peaks to which they lead up. Unless men and women live for eternity, they *are* 'merely players,' and all their busy days 'like a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, *signifying nothing*.' How absurd, how monotonous, how trivial it all is, all this fret and fume, all these dying joys and only less fleeting pains, all this mill-horse round of work which we pace, unless we are, mill-horse-like, driving a shaft that goes *through the wall*, and grinds something that falls into 'bags that wax not old' on the other side. The true Christian faith teaches us that this world is the workshop where God makes men, and the next, the palace where He shows them. All here is apprenticeship and training. It is of no more value than the attitudes into which gymnasts throw themselves, but as a discipline most precious. The end makes the means important; and if we believe that God is preparing us for immortal life with Him by all our work, then we shall do it with a will: otherwise we may well be languid as we go on for thirty or forty years, some of us, doing the same trivial things, and getting nothing out of them but food, occupation of time, and a mechanical aptitude for doing what is not worth doing.

It is the horizon that gives dignity to the foreground. A picture without sky has no glory. This present, unless we see gleaming beyond it the eternal calm of the heavens, above the tossing tree-tops with withering leaves, and the smoky chimneys, is a poor thing for our eyes to gaze at, or our hearts to love, or our hands to toil on. But when we see that all paths lead to heaven, and that our eternity is affected by our acts in time, then it is blessed to gaze, it is possible to love, the earthly shadows of the uncreated beauty, it is worth while to work.

Remember, too, that faith will energise us for any sort of work, seeing that it raises all to one level and brings all under one sanction, and shows all as co-operating to one end. Look at that muster-roll of heroes of faith in the Epistle to the Hebrews, and mark the variety of grades of human life represented there—statesmen, soldiers, prophets, shepherds, widow women, martyrs—all fitted for their tasks and delivered from the snare that was in their calling, by that faith which raised them above the world, and therefore fitted them to come down on the world with stronger strokes of duty. This is the secret of doing with our might whatsoever our hand finds to do—to trust Christ, to live *with* Him, and *by* the hope of the inheritance.

Then, brethren, let us see that our clearer revelation bears fruit in a faith in the great divine promises as calm and firm as this dying patriarch had. Then the same power will work not only the same detachment and energy in life, but the same calmness and solemn light of hope in death. It is very beautiful to notice how Joseph dying almost overleaps the thought of death as a very small matter. His brethren who stood by his bedside might well fear what might be the consequences to their people when the powerful protector, the prime minister of the kingdom, was gone. But the dying man has firm hold of God's promises, and he knows that these will be fulfilled, whether he live or no. 'I die,' says he, 'but God shall surely visit you. *He* is not going to die; and though I stand no more before Pharaoh, you will be safe.'

Thus we may contemplate our own going away, or the departure of the dearest from our homes, and of the most powerful for good in human affairs, and in the faith of God's true promises may feel that no one is indispensable to our well-being or to the world's good. God's chariot is self-moving. One after another, who lays his hand upon the ropes, and hauls for a little space, drops out of the ranks. But it will go on, and in His majesty He will ride prosperously.

And for himself, too, the dying man felt that death was a very small matter. 'Whether I live or die I shall have a share in the promise. Living, perhaps my feet would stand upon its soil; dying, my bones will rest there.' And we, who know a resurrection, have in it that which makes Joseph's fond fancy a reality, and reduces the importance of that last enemy to nothing. Some will be alive and remain till the coming of the Lord, some will be laid in the grave till His voice calls them forth, and carries their bones up from hence to the land of the inheritance. But whether we be of generations that fell on sleep looking for the promise of His coming, or whether of the generation that go forth to meet Him when He comes, it matters not. All who have lived by faith will there be gathered at last. The brightest hopes of the present will be forgotten. Then, when we too shall stand in the latter day, wearing the likeness of His glory, and extricated wholly from the bondage of corruption and the dust of death, we, perfected in body, soul, and spirit, shall enter the calm home, where we shall change the solitude of the desert and the transitoriness of the tent and the dangers of the journey, for the society and the stability and the security of the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

A COFFIN IN EGYPT

'They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.'—GENESIS l. 26.

So closes the book of Genesis. All its recorded dealings of God with Israel, and all the promises and the glories of the patriarchal line, end with 'a coffin in Egypt.' Such an ending is the more striking, when we remember that a space of three hundred years intervenes between the last events in Genesis and the first in Exodus, or almost as long a time as parts the Old Testament from the New. And, during all that period, Israel was left with a mummy and a hope. The elaborately embalmed body of Joseph lay in its gilded and pictured case, somewhere in Goshen, and was, no doubt, in the care of the Israelites, as is plain from the fact that they carried it with them at the exodus. For three centuries, that silent 'coffin in Egypt' preached its impressive messages. What did it say? It spoke, no doubt, to ears often deaf, but still some faint whispers of its speechless testimony would sound in some hearts, and help to keep vivid some hopes.

First, it was a silent reminder of mortality. Egyptian consciousness was much occupied with death. The land was peopled with tombs. But the corpse of Joseph was perhaps not laid in one of these, but remained housed somewhere in sight, as it were, of all Israel. Many a passer-by would pause for a moment, and think: Here is the end of dignity second only to Pharaoh's, to this has come that strong brain, that true heart, Israel's pride and protection is shut up in that wooden case.

'The glories of our birth and state
  Are shadows, not substantial things;
There is no armour against fate,
  Death lays his icy hand on kings.'

Yes, but let us remember that while that silent sarcophagus enforced the old, old lesson to the successive generations that looked on it and little heeded its stern, sad teaching of mortality, it had other brighter truths to tell. For the shrivelled, colourless lips that lay in it, covered with many a fold of linen, had left as their last utterance, 'I die, but God will surely visit you.' No man is necessary. Israel can survive the loss of the strongest and wisest. God lives, though a hundred Josephs die. It is pure gain to lose human helpers, if thereby we become more fully conscious of our need of a divine arm and heart, and more truly feel that we have these for our all-sufficient stay. Blessed is the fleeting of all that can pass, if its withdrawal lets the calm light of the Eternal, which cannot pass, stream in uninterrupted on us! When the leaves fall, we see more clearly the rock which their short-lived greenness in its pride veiled. When the many-hued and ever-shifting clouds are swept out of the sky by the wind, the sun that lent them all their colour shines the more brightly. The message of every death-bed and grave is meant to be, 'This and that man dies, but God lives.' The last result of our contemplation of mortality, as affecting our dearest and most needful ones, and as sure to include ourselves in its far-reaching, close-woven net, ought to be to drive us to God's breast, that there we may find a Friend who does not pass, and may dwell in 'the land of the living,' on whose soil the foot of all-conquering Death dare never tread.

Nor are these thoughts all the message of that 'coffin in Egypt.' In the first verses of the next book, that of Exodus, there is a remarkable juxtaposition of ideas, when we read that 'Joseph died and all his brethren and all that generation.' But was that the end of Israel? By no means, for the narrative goes on immediately to say—linking the two things together by a simple 'and'—that 'the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied and waxed exceeding mighty.'

So life springs side by side with death. There are cradles as well as graves.

> 'The individual withers,
> And the race is more and more.'

Leaves drop and new leaves come. The April days are not darkened, and the tender green of the fresh leaf-buds is all the more vigorous and luxuriant, because it is fed from the decaying leaves that litter the roots of the long-lived oak. Thus through the ages the pathetic alternation goes on. Penelope's web is ever being woven and run down and woven again.

Joseph dies; Israel grows. Let us not take half-views, nor either fix our thoughts on the universal law of dissolution and decay, nor on the other side of the process—the universal emergence of life from death, reconstruction from dissolution. In our individual histories and on the wider field of the world's history, the same large law is at work, which is expressed in the simplest terms by these old words, 'Joseph died, and all his brethren and all that generation'—and 'the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly.' So the wholesome lesson of mortality is stripped of much of its sadness, and retains all its pathos, solemnity, and power to purify the heart.

Again, that 'coffin in Egypt' was a herald of Hope. The reason for Joseph's dying injunction that his body should be preserved after the Egyptian fashion, and laid where it could be lifted and carried away, when the long-expected deliverance was effected, was the dying patriarch's firm confidence that, though he died, he had still somehow a share in God's faithful promise. We do not know the precise shape which his thought of that share took. It may have been merely the natural sentiment which desires that the unconscious frame shall moulder quietly beside the mouldering forms which once held our dear ones. This naturalised Egyptian did his work manfully in the land of his adoption, and flung himself eagerly into its interests, but his heart turned to the cave at Machpelah, and, though he lived in Egypt, he could not bear to think of lying there for ever when dead, especially of being left there alone. There may have been some trace in his wish of the peculiar Egyptian belief that the preservation of the body contributed in some way to the continuance of personal life, and that a certain shadowy self hovered about the spot where the mummy was laid. Our knowledge of the large place filled by a doctrine of a future life in Egyptian thought makes it most probable that Joseph had at least some forecast of that hope of immortality, which seems to us to be inseparable from the consciousness of present communion with God.

But, in any case, Israel had charge of that coffin because the dead man that lay in it had, on the very edge of the gulf of death, believed that he had still a portion in Israel's hope, and that, when he had taken the plunge into the great darkness, he had not sunk below the reach of God's power to give him personal fulfilment of His yet unfulfilled promise. His dying command was the expression of his unshaken faith that, though he was dead, God would visit him with His salvation, and give him to see the prosperity of His chosen, that he might rejoice in the gladness of the nation, and glory with His inheritance. He had lived, trusting in God's bare promise, and, as he lived, he died. The Epistle to the Hebrews lays hold of the true motive power in the incident, when it points to Joseph's dying 'commandment concerning his bones' as a noble instance of Faith.

Thus, through slow creeping centuries, this silent preacher said—'Hope on, though the vision tarry, wait for it, for it will surely come. God is faithful, and will perform His word.' There was much to make hope faint. To bring Israel out of Canaan seemed a strange way of investing it with the possession of Canaan. As the tardy years trickled away, drop by drop, and the promise seemed no nearer fulfilment, some film of doubt must have crept over Hope's bright eyes. When new dynasties reigned, and Israel slowly sank into the state of bondage, it must have been still harder to believe that the shortest road to the inheritance was round by Goshen. But through all the darkening course of Israel in these sad centuries, there stood the 'coffin,' the token of a triumphant faith which had leapt, as a trifle, over the barrier of death, and grasped as real the good which lay beyond that frowning wall. We have a better Herald of hope than a mummy-case and a pyramid built round it. We have an empty grave and an occupied Throne, by which to nourish our confidence in Immortality and our estimate of the insignificance of death. Our Joseph does not say—'I die, but God will surely visit you,' but He gives us the wonderful assurance of identification with Himself, and consequent participation in His glory—'Because I live, ye shall live also.' Therefore our hope should be as much brighter and more confirmed than this ancient one was as that on which it is based is better and more joyous. But, alas, there is no invariable proportion between food supplied and strength derived. An orchid can fling out gorgeous blooms, though it grows on a piece of dry wood, but plants set in rich soil often show poor flowers. Our hope will be worthy of its foundation, only on condition of our habitually reflecting on the firmness of that foundation, and cultivating familiarity with the things hoped for.

There are many ways in which the apostle's great saying that 'we are saved by hope' approves itself as true. Whatever leads us to grasp the future rather than the present, even if it is but an earthly future, and to live by hope rather than by fruition, even if it is but a short-reaching hope, lifts us in the scale of being, ennobles, dignifies, and in some respects purifies us. Even men whose expectations have not wing-power enough to cross the dreadful ravine of Death, are elevated in the degree in which they work towards a distant goal. Short-sighted hopes are better than blind absorption in the present. Whatever puts the centre of gravity of our lives in the future is a gain, and most of all is that hope blessed, which bids us look forward to an eternal sitting with Jesus at the right hand of God.

If such hope has any solidity in it, it will certainly detach us from the order of things in which we dwell. The world is always tempting us to 'forget the imperial palace' whither we go. The Israelites must have been swayed by many inducements to settle down for good and all in the low levels of fertile Goshen, and to think themselves better off there than if going out on a perilous enterprise to win no richer pastures than they already possessed. In fact, when the deliverance came, it was not particularly welcome, even though oppression was embittering the peoples' lives. But, when hope had died down in them, and desire had become languid, and ignoble contentment with their flocks and herds had dulled their spirits, Joseph's silent coffin must have pealed in their ears—'This is not your rest; arise and claim your inheritance.' In like manner, the pressure of the apparently solid realities of to-day, the growth of the 'scientific' temper of mind which confines knowledge to physical facts, the drift of tendency among religious people to regard Christianity mainly in its aspect of dealing with social questions and bringing present good, powerfully reinforce our natural sluggishness of Hope, and have brought it about that the average Christian of this day has fewer of his thoughts directed to the future life than his predecessors had, or than it is good for him to have.

Among the many truths which almost need to be rediscovered by their professed believers, that of the rest that remains for the people of God is one. For the test of believing a truth is its influence on conduct, and no one can affirm that the conduct of the average Christian of our times bears marks of being deeply influenced by that Future, or by the hope of winning it. Does he live as if he felt that he was an alien among the material things surrounding him? Does it look as if his true affinities were beyond the grave and above the stars? If we did thus feel, not at rare intervals, when 'in seasons of calm weather, our souls have sight of that immortal sea,' which lies glassy before the throne, and on whose banks the minstrels stand singing the song of Moses and of the Lamb, but habitually and with a vivid realisation, which makes the things hoped for more solid than what we touch and handle, our lives would be far other than they are. We should not work less, but more, earnestly at our present duties, whatever these may be, for they would be seen in new importance as bearing on our place in that world of consequences. The more our goal and prize are seen gleaming through the dust of the race-ground, the more strenuous our effort here. Nothing ennobles the trifles of our lives in time like the streaming in on these of the light of eternity. That vision ever present with us will not sadden. The fact of mortality is grim enough, if forced upon us unaccompanied by the other fact that Death opens the gate of our Home. But when the else depressing thought that 'here we have no continuing city' is but the obverse and result of the fact that 'we seek one to come,' it is freed from its sadness, and becomes powerful for good and even for joy. We need, even more than Israel in its bondage did, to realise that we are strangers and pilgrims. It concerns the depth of our religion and the reality of our profiting by the discipline, as well as of our securing the enjoyment of the blessings, of the fleeting and else trivial present, that we shall keep very clear in view the great future which dignifies and interprets this enigmatical earthly life.

Further, that 'coffin in Egypt' was a preacher of patience. As we have seen, three centuries at least, probably a somewhat longer period, passed between the time when Joseph's corpse was laid in it, and the night when it was lifted out of it by the departing Israelites. No doubt, hope deferred had made many a heart sick, and the weary question, 'Where is the promise of His coming?' had in some cases changed into bitter disbelief that the promise would ever be fulfilled. But, for all these years, the dumb monitor stood there proclaiming, 'If the vision tarry, wait for it.'

Surely we need the same lesson. It is hard for us to acquiesce in the slow march of the divine purposes. Life is short, and desire would fain see the great harvests reaped before death seals our eyes. Sometimes the very prospect of the great things that shall one day be accomplished in the world, and we not there to see, weighs heavily on us. Reformers, philanthropists, idealists of all sorts are constitutionally impatient, and in their generous haste to see their ideals realised, forget that 'raw haste' is 'half-sister to delay,' and are indignant with man for his sluggishness and with God for His majestic slowness. Not less do we fret and fume and think the days drag with intolerable slowness, before some eagerly expected good rises like a star on our individual lives. But there is deep truth in Paul's apparent paradox, that 'if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.' The more sure the confidence, the more quiet the patient waiting. It is uncertainty which makes earthly hope short of breath, and impatient of delay.

But since a Christian man's hope is consolidated into certainty, and when it is set on God, cannot only say, I trust that it will be so and so, but, I know that it shall, it may well be content to be patient for the fulfilment, 'as the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it.' 'One day is with the Lord as a thousand years,' in respect of the magnitude of the changes which may be wrought by the instantaneous operation of His hand when the appointed hour shall strike, and therefore it should not strain our patience nor stagger our faith that 'a thousand years' should be 'as one day,' in respect of the visible approximation achieved in them, towards the establishment of His purpose. The world was prepared for man through countless millenniums. Man was prepared for the advent of Christ through long centuries. Nineteen hundred years have effected comparatively little in incorporating the issues of Christ's work in the consciousness and characters of mankind. Much of the slowness of that progress of Christianity is due to the faithlessness and sloth of professing Christians. But it still remains true that God lifts His foot slowly, and plants it firmly, in His march through the world. So, both in regard to the progress of truth, and the diffusion of the highest, and of the secondary, blessings of Christianity through the nations, and in respect to the reception of individual good gifts, we shall do wisely to leave God to settle the 'when,' since we are sure that He has bound Himself to accomplish the fact.

Finally, that 'coffin in Egypt' was a pledge of possession. It lay long among the Israelites to uphold fainting faith, and at last was carried up before their host, and reverently guarded during forty years' wanderings, till it was deposited in the cave at Machpelah, beside the tombs of the fathers of the nation. Thus it became to the nation, and remains for us, a symbol of the truth that no hope based upon God's bare word is ever finally disappointed. From all other anticipations grounded on anything less solid, the element of uncertainty is inseparable, and Fear is ever the sister of Hope. With keen insight Spenser makes these two march side by side, in his wonderful procession of the attendants of earthly Love. There is always a lurking sadness in Hope's smiles, and a nameless dread in her eyes. And all expectations busied with or based upon the contingencies of this poor life, whether they are fulfilled or disappointed, prove less sweet in fruition than in prospect, and often turn to ashes in the eating, instead of the sweet bread which we had thought them to be. One basis alone is sure, and that is the foundation on which Joseph rested and risked everything—the plain promise of God. He who builds on that rock will never be put to shame, and when floods sweep away every refuge built on sand, he will not need to 'make haste' to find, amid darkness and storm, some less precarious shelter, but will look down serenely on the wildest torrent, and know it to be impotent to wash away his fortress home.

There is no nobler example of victorious faith which prolonged confident expectation beyond the insignificant accident of death than Joseph's dying 'commandment concerning his bones.' His confidence, indeed, grasped a far lower blessing than ours should reach out to clasp. It was evoked by less clear and full promises and pledges than we have. The magnitude and loftiness of the Christian hope of Immortality, and the certitude of the fact on which it reposes, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, should result in a corresponding increase in the firmness and clearness of our hope, and in its power in our lives. The average Christian of to-day may well be sent to school to Joseph on his death-bed. Is our faith as strong as—I will not ask if it is stronger than—that of this man who, in the morning twilight of revelation, and with a hope of an eternal possession of an earthly inheritance, which, one might have thought, would be shattered by death, was able to fling his anchor clean across the gulf when he gave injunction, 'Carry my bones up hence'? We have a better inheritance, and fuller, clearer promises and facts on which to trust. Shame to us if we have a feebler faith.

EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt. D.

EXODUS, LEVITICUS AND NUMBERS

CONTENTS

THE BOOK OF EXODUS

PAGE
Four Shaping Centuries (Exodus i. 1-14) . . . 1
Death and Growth (Exodus i. 6, 7) . . . 5
The Ark among the Flags (Exodus ii. 1-10) . . 12
The Bush that burned, and did not burn out (Exodus iii. 2) 19
The Call of Moses (Exodus iii. 10-20) . . . 26
A Last Merciful Warning (Exodus xi. 1-10) . . 33
The Passover: an Expiation and a Feast, a Memorial and a Prophecy (Exodus xii. 1-14) . . . 38
Thought, Deed, Word (Exodus xiii. 9) . . . 46
A Path in the Sea (Exodus xiv. 19-31) . . . 52
'My Strength and Song' (Exodus xv. 2) . . . 61
The Shepherd and the Fold (Exodus xv. 13) . . 61
The Ultimate Hope (Exodus xv. 17) . . . 63

PAGE

Marah (Exodus xv. 23-25) 64

The Bread of God (Exodus xvi. 4-12) . . . 65

Jehovah Nissi (Exodus xvii. 15) 72

Gershom and Eliezer (Exodus xviii. 3, 4) . . 80

The Ideal Statesman (Exodus xviii. 21) . . . 88

The Decalogue:—I. Man and God (Exodus xx. 1-11) . 97

The Decalogue:—II. Man and Man (Exodus xx. 12-21) . 107

The Feast of Ingathering in the end of the Year (Exodus xxiii. 16) 115

'The Love of Thine Espousals' (Exodus xxiv. 1-12) . 118

The Bread of the Presence (Exodus xxv. 30) . . 126

The Golden Lampstand (Exodus xxv. 31) . . . 134

The Names on Aaron's Breastplate (Exodus xxviii. 12, 29) 144

Three Inscriptions with one Meaning (Exodus xxviii. 36; Zech. xiv. 20; Rev. xxii. 4) 151

The Altar of Incense (Exodus xxx. 1) . . . 159

Ransom for Souls—I. (Exodus xxx. 12) . . . 168

Ransom for Souls—II. (Exodus xxx. 15) . . . 170

The Golden Calf (Exodus xxxii. 1-8, 30-35) . . 171

The Swift Decay of Love (Exodus xxxii. 15-26) . . 177

PAGE
THE MEDIATOR'S THREEFOLD PRAYER (Exodus xxxiii. 12-23) 186
GOD PROCLAIMING HIS OWN NAME (Exodus xxxiv. 6) . 195
SIN AND FORGIVENESS (Exodus xxxiv. 7) . . . 199
BLESSED AND TRAGIC UNCONSCIOUSNESS (Exodus xxxiv. 29; Judges xvi. 20) 204
AN OLD SUBSCRIPTION LIST (Exodus xxxv. 21) . . 213
THE COPIES OF THINGS IN THE HEAVENS (Exodus xl. 1-16) 223

THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS

THE BURNT OFFERING A PICTURE AND A PROPHECY (Lev. i. 1-9) 233
STRANGE FIRE (Lev. x. 1-11) 240
THE FIRST STAGE IN THE LEPER'S CLEANSING (Lev. xiv. 1-7) 247
THE DAY OF ATONEMENT (Lev. xvi. 1-19) . . . 248
'THE SCAPEGOAT' (Lev. xvi. 22) 254
THE CONSECRATION OF JOY (Lev. xxiii. 33-44) . . 261
SOJOURNERS WITH GOD (Lev. xxv. 23) . . . 269
GOD'S SLAVES (Lev. xxv. 42) 279

PAGE
THE KINSMAN REDEEMER (Lev. xxv. 48) . . . 280
THE OLD STORE AND THE NEW (Lev. xxvi. 10) . . 284
EMANCIPATED SLAVES (Lev. xxvi. 13) . . . 291

THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

THE WARFARE OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE (Num. iv. 23) . 297
THE GUIDING PILLAR (Num. ix. 16) 305
HOBAB (Num. x. 29) 314
THE HALLOWING OF WORK AND OF REST (Num. x. 35, 36) . 321
MOSES DESPONDENT (Num. xi. 14) 329
AFRAID OF GIANTS (Num. xiii. 17-33) . . . 332
WEIGHED, AND FOUND WANTING (Num. xiv. 1-10) . . 340
MOSES THE INTERCESSOR (Num. xiv. 19) . . . 349
SERVICE A GIFT (Num. xviii. 7) 352
THE WATERS OF MERIBAH (Num. xx. 1-13) . . 353
THE POISON AND THE ANTIDOTE (Num. xxi. 4-9) . . 362
BALAAM (Num. xxii. 5) 367
AN UNFULFILLED DESIRE (Num. xxiii. 10; xxxi. 8) . . 371

THE BOOK OF EXODUS

FOUR SHAPING CENTURIES

'Now these are the names of the children of Israel, which came into Egypt: every man and his household came with Jacob. 2. Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, 3. Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, 4. Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. 5. And all the souls that came out of the loins of Jacob were seventy souls: for Joseph was in Egypt already. 6. And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation. 7. And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them. 8. Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. 9. And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: 10. Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land. 11. Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure-cities, Pithom and Raamses. 12. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel. 13. And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigour: 14. And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigour.'—Exodus i. 1-14.

The four hundred years of Israel's stay in Egypt were divided into two unequal periods, in the former and longer of which they were prosperous and favoured, while in the latter they were oppressed. Both periods had their uses and place in the shaping of the nation and its preparation for the Exodus. Both carry permanent lessons.

I. The long days of unclouded prosperity. These extended over centuries, the whole history of which is summed up in two words: death and growth. The calm years glided on, and the shepherds in Goshen had the happiness of having no annals. All that needed to be recorded was that, one by one, the first generation died off, and that the new generations 'were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty.' The emphatic repetitions recall the original promises in Genesis xii. 2, xvii. 4, 5, xviii. 18. The preceding specification of the number of the original settlers (repeated from Genesis xlvi. 27) brings into impressive contrast the small beginnings and the rapid increase. We may note that eloquent setting side by side of the two processes which are ever going on simultaneously, death and birth.

One by one men pass out of the warmth and light into the darkness, and so gradually does the withdrawal proceed that we scarcely are aware of its going on, but at last 'all that generation' has vanished. The old trees are all cleared off the ground, and everywhere their place is taken by the young saplings. The web is ever being woven at one end, and run down at the other. 'The individual withers, but the race is more and more.' How solemn that continual play of opposing movements is, and how blind we are to its solemnity!

That long period of growth may be regarded in two lights. It effected the conversion of a horde into a nation by numerical increase, and so was a link in the chain of the divine working. The great increase, of which the writer speaks so strongly, was, no doubt, due to the favourable circumstances of the life in Goshen, but was none the less regarded by him, and rightly so, as God's doing. As the Psalmist sings, '*He* increased His people greatly.' 'Natural processes' are the implements of a supernatural will. So Israel was being multiplied, and the end for which it was peacefully growing into a multitude was hidden from all but God. But there was another end, in reference to which the years of peaceful prosperity may be regarded; namely, the schooling of the people to patient trust in the long-delayed fulfilment of the promise. That hope had burned bright in Joseph when he died, and he being dead yet spake of it from his coffin to the successive generations. Delay is fitted and intended to strengthen faith and make hope more eager. But that part of the divine purpose, alas! was not effected as the former was. In the moral region every circumstance has two opposite results possible. Each condition has, as it were, two handles, and we can take it by either, and generally take it by the wrong one. Whatever is meant to better us may be so used by us as to worsen us. And the history of Israel in Egypt and in the desert shows only too plainly that ease weakened, if it did not kill, faith, and that Goshen was so pleasant that it drove the hope and the wish for Canaan out of mind. 'While the bridegroom tarried they all slumbered and slept.' Is not Israel in Egypt, slackening hold of the promise because it tarried, a mirror in which the Church may see itself? and do *we* not know the enervating influence of Goshen, making us reluctant to shoulder our packs and turn out for the pilgrimage? The desert repels more strongly than Canaan attracts.

II. The shorter period of oppression. Probably the rise of a 'new king' means a revolution in which a native dynasty expelled foreign monarchs. The Pharaoh of the oppression was, perhaps, the great Rameses II., whose long reign of sixty-seven years gives ample room for protracted and grinding oppression of Israel. The policy adopted was characteristic of these early despotisms, in its utter disregard of humanity and of everything but making the kingdom safe. It was not intentionally cruel, it was merely indifferent to the suffering it occasioned. 'Let us deal *wisely* with them'—never mind about justice, not to say kindness. Pharaoh's 'politics,' like those of some other rulers who divorce them from morality, turned out to be impolitic, and his 'wisdom' proved to be roundabout folly. He was afraid that the Israelites, if they were allowed to grow, might find out their strength and seek to emigrate; and so he set to work to weaken them with hard bondage, not seeing that that was sure to make them wish the very thing that he was blunderingly trying to prevent. The only way to make men glad to remain in a community is to make them at home there. The sense of injustice is the strongest disintegrating force. If there is a 'dangerous class,' the surest way to make them more dangerous is to treat them harshly. It was a blunder to make 'lives bitter,' for hearts also were embittered. So the people were ripened for revolt, and Goshen became less attractive.

God used Pharaoh's foolish wisdom, as He had used natural laws, to prepare for the Exodus. The long years of ease had multiplied the nation. The period of oppression was to stir them up out of their comfortable nest, and make them willing to risk the bold dash for freedom. Is not that the explanation, too, of the similar times in our lives? It needs that we should experience life's sorrows and burdens, and find how hard the world's service is, and how quickly our Goshens may become places of grievous toil, in order that the weak hearts, which cling so tightly to earth, may be detached from it, and taught to reach upwards to God. 'Blessed is the man . . . in whose heart are thy ways,' and happy is he who so profits by his sorrows that they stir in him the pilgrim's spirit, and make him yearn after Canaan, and not grudge to leave Goshen. Our ease and our troubles, opposite though they seem and are, are meant to further the same end,—to make us fit for the journey which leads to rest and home. We often misuse them both, letting the one sink us in earthly delights and oblivion of the great hope, and the other embitter our spirits without impelling them to seek the things that are above. Let us use the one for thankfulness, growth, and patient hope, and the other for writing deep the conviction that this is not our rest, and making firm the resolve that we will gird our loins and, staff in hand, go forth on the pilgrim road, not shrinking from the wilderness, because we see the mountains of Canaan across its sandy flats.

DEATH AND GROWTH

'And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation. 7. And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty. . . .'—EXODUS i. 6, 7.

THESE remarkable words occur in a short section which makes the link between the Books of Genesis and of Exodus. The writer recapitulates the list of the immigrants into Egypt, in the household of Jacob, and then, as it were, having got them there, he clears the stage to prepare for a new set of actors. These few words are all that he cares to tell us about a period somewhat longer than that which separates us from the great Protestant Reformation. He notes but two processes —silent dropping away and silent growth. 'Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation. Plant by plant the leaves drop, and the stem rots and its place is empty. Seed by seed the tender green spikelets pierce the mould, and the field waves luxuriant in the breeze and the sunshine. 'The children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly.'

I. Now, then, let us look at this twofold process which is always at work—silent dropping away and silent growth.

It seems to me that the writer, probably unconsciously, being profoundly impressed with certain features of that dropping away, reproduces them most strikingly in the very structure of his sentence: 'Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation.' The uniformity of the fate, and the separate times at which it befell individuals, are strongly set forth in the clauses, which sound like the threefold falls of earth on a coffin. They all died, but not all at the same time. They went one by one, one by one, till, at the end, they were all gone. The two things that appeal to our imagination, and ought to appeal to our consciences and wills, in reference to the succession of the generations of men, are given very strikingly, I think, in the language of my text—namely, the stealthy assaults of death upon the individuals, and its final complete victory.

If any of you were ever out at sea, and looked over a somewhat stormy water, you will have noticed, I dare say, how strangely the white crests of the breakers disappear, as if some force, acting from beneath, had plucked them under, and over the spot where they gleamed for a moment runs the blue sea. So the waves break over the great ocean of time; I might say, like swimmers pulled under by sharks, man after man, man after man, gets twitched down, till at the end—'Joseph died, and all his brethren, and *all* that generation.'

There is another process going on side by side with this. In the vegetable world, spring and autumn are two different seasons; May rejoices in green leaves and opening buds, and nests with their young broods; but winter days are coming when the greenery drops and the nests are empty, and the birds flown. But the singular and impressive thing (which we should see if we were not so foolish and blind) which the writer of our text lays his finger upon is that at the same time the two opposite processes of death and renewal are going on, so that if you look at the facts from the one side it seems nothing but a charnel-house and a Golgotha that we live in, while, seen from the other side, it is a scene of rejoicing, budding young life, and growth.

You get these two processes in the closest juxtaposition in ordinary life. There is many a house where there is a coffin upstairs and a cradle downstairs. The churchyard is often the children's playground. The web is being run down at the one end and woven at the other. Wherever we look—

> 'Every moment dies a man,
> Every moment one is born.'

'Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation. And the children of Israel . . . multiplied . . . exceedingly.'

But there is another thought here than that of the contemporaneousness of the two processes, and that is, as it is written on John Wesley's monument in Westminster Abbey, 'God buries the workmen and carries on the work.' The great Vizier who seemed to be the only protection of Israel is lying in 'a coffin in Egypt.' And all these truculent brothers of his that had tormented him, they are gone, and the whole generation is swept away. What of that? They were the depositories of God's purposes for a little while. Are God's purposes dead because the instruments that in part wrought them are gone? By no means. If I might use a very vulgar proverb, 'There are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it,' especially if God casts the net. So when the one generation has passed away there is the other to take up the work. Thus the text is a fitting introduction to the continuance of the history of the further unfolding of God's plan which occupies the Book of Exodus.

II. Such being the twofold process suggested by this text, let us next note the lessons which it enforces.

In the first place, let us be quite sure that we give it its due weight in our thoughts and lives. Let us be quite sure that we never give an undue weight to the one half of the whole truth. There are plenty of people who are far too much, constitutionally and (perhaps by reason of a mistaken notion of religion) religiously, inclined to the contemplation of the more melancholy side of these truths; and there are a great many people who are far too exclusively disposed to the contemplation of the other. But the bulk of us never trouble our heads about either the one or the other, but go on, forgetting altogether that swift, sudden, stealthy, skinny hand that, if I might go back to my former metaphor, is put out to lay hold of the swimmer and then pull him underneath the water, and which will clasp us by the ankles one day and drag us down. Do you ever think about it? If not, surely, surely you are leaving out of sight one of what ought to be the formative elements in our lives.

And then, on the other hand, when our hearts are faint, or when the pressure of human mortality—our own, that of our dear ones, or that of others—seems to weigh us down, or when it looks to us as if God's work was failing for want of people to do it, let us remember the other side—'And the children of Israel . . . increased . . . and waxed exceeding mighty; . . . and the land was filled with them.' So we shall keep the middle path, which is the path of safety, and so avoid the folly of extremes.

But then, more particularly, let me say that this double contemplation of the two processes under which we live ought to stimulate us to service. It ought to say to us, 'Do you cast in your lot with that work which is going to be carried on through the ages. Do you see to it that your little task is in the same line of direction as the great purpose which God is working out—the increasing purpose which runs through the ages.' An individual life is a mere little backwater, as it were, in the great ocean. But its minuteness does not matter, if only the great tidal wave which rolls away out there, in the depths and the distance amongst the fathomless abysses, tells also on the tiny pool far inland and yet connected with the sea by some narrow, long fiord.

If my little life is part of that great ocean, then the ebb and flow will alike act on it and make it wholesome. If my work is done in and for God, I shall never have to look back and say, as we certainly shall say one day, either here or yonder, unless our lives be thus part of the divine plan, 'What a fool I was! Seventy years of toiling and moiling and effort and sweat, and it has all come to nothing; like a long algebraic sum that covers pages of intricate calculations, and the *pluses* and *minuses* just balance each other; and the net result is a great round nought.' So let us remember the twofold process, and let it stir us to make sure that 'in our embers' shall be 'something that doth live,' and that not 'Nature,' but something better—God—'remembers what was so fugitive.' It is not fugitive if it is a part of the mighty whole.

But further, let this double contemplation make us very content with doing insignificant and unfinished work.

Joseph might have said, when he lay dying: 'Well!

perhaps I made a mistake after all. I should not have brought this people down here, even if I have been led hither. I do not see that I have helped them one step towards the possession of the land.' Do you remember the old proverb about certain people who should not see half-finished work? All our work in this world has to be only what the physiologists call functional. God has a great scheme running on through ages. Joseph gives it a helping hand for a time, and then somebody else takes up the running, and carries the purpose forward a little further. A great many hands are placed on the ropes that draw the car of the Ruler of the world. And one after another they get stiffened in death; but the car goes on. We should be contented to do our little bit of the work. Never mind whether it is complete and smooth and rounded or not. Never mind whether it can be isolated from the rest and held up, and people can say, 'He did that entire thing unaided.' That is not the way for most of us. A great many threads go to make the piece of cloth, and a great many throws of the shuttle to weave the web. A great many bits of glass make up the mosaic pattern; and there is no reason for the red bit to pride itself on its fiery glow, or the grey bit to boast of its silvery coolness. They are all parts of the pattern, and as long as they keep their right places they complete the artist's design. Thus, if we think of how 'one soweth and another reapeth,' we may be content to receive half-done works from our fathers, and to hand on unfinished tasks to them that come after us. It is not a great trial of a man's modesty, if he lives near Jesus Christ, to be content to do but a very small bit of the Master's work.

And the last thing that I would say is, let this double process going on all round us lift our thoughts to Him who lives for ever. Moses dies; Joshua catches the torch from his hand. And the reason why he catches the torch from his hand is because God said, 'As I was with Moses so I will be with thee.' Therefore we have to turn away in our contemplations from the mortality that has swallowed up so much wisdom and strength, eloquence and power, which the Church or our own hearts seem so sorely to want: and, whilst we do, we have to look up to Jesus Christ and say, 'He lives! He lives! No man is indispensable for public work or for private affection and solace so long as there is a living Christ for us to hold by.'

Dear brethren, we need that conviction for ourselves often. When life seems empty and hope dead, and nothing is able to fill the vacuity or still the pain, we have to look to the vision of the Lord sitting on the empty throne, high and lifted up, and yet very near the aching and void heart. Christ lives, and that is enough.

So the separated workers in all the generations, who did their little bit of service, like the many generations of builders who laboured through centuries upon the completion of some great cathedral, will be united at the last; 'and he that soweth, and he that reapeth, shall rejoice together' in the harvest which was produced by neither the sower nor the reaper, but by Him who blessed the toils of both.

'Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation'; but Jesus lives, and therefore His people 'grow and multiply,' and His servants' work is blessed; and at the end they shall be knit together in the common joy of the great harvest, and of the day when the headstone is brought forth with shoutings of 'Grace! grace unto it.'

THE ARK AMONG THE FLAGS

'And there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi. 2. And the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months. 3. And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink. 4. And his sister stood afar off, to wit what would be done to him. 5. And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it. 6. And when she had opened it, she saw the child: and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children. 7. Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee? 8. And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child's mother. 9. And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it. 10. And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water.'—EXODUS ii. 1-10.

I. IT is remarkable that all the persons in this narrative are anonymous. We know that the names of 'the man of the house of Levi' and his wife were Amram and Jochebed. Miriam was probably the anxious sister who watched what became of the little coffer. The daughter of Pharaoh has two names in Jewish tradition, one of which corresponds to that which Brugsch has found to have been borne by one of Rameses' very numerous daughters. One likes to think that the name of the gentle-hearted woman has come down to us; but, whether she was called 'Meri or not, she and the others have no name here. The reason can scarcely have been ignorance. But they are, as it were, kept in shadow, because the historian saw, and wished us to see, that a higher Hand was at work, and that over all the events recorded in these verses there brooded the informing, guiding Spirit of God Himself, the sole actor.

'Each only as God wills
Can work—God's puppets, best and worst,
Are we: there is no last nor first.'

II. The mother's motive in braving the danger to herself involved in keeping the child is remarkably put. 'When she saw that he was a goodly child, she hid him.' It was not only a mother's love that emboldened her, as it does all weak creatures, to shelter her offspring at her own peril, but something in the look of the infant, as it lay on her bosom, touched her with a dim hope. According to the Septuagint translation, both parents shared in this. And so the Epistle to the Hebrews unites them in that which is here attributed to the mother only. Stephen, too, speaks of Moses as 'fair in God's sight.' As if the prescient eyes of the parents were not blinded by love, but rather cleared to see some token of divine benediction resting on him. The writer of the *Hebrews* lifts the deed out of the category of instinctive maternal affection up to the higher level of faith. So we may believe that the aspect of her child woke some prophetic vision in the mother's soul, and that she and her husband were of those who cherished the hopes naturally born from the promise to Abraham, nurtured by Jacob's and Joseph's dying wish to be buried in Canaan, and matured by the tyranny of Pharaoh. Their faith, at all events, grasped the unseen God as their helper, and made Jochebed bold to break the terrible law, as a hen will fly in the face of a mastiff to shield her brood. Their faith perhaps also grasped the future deliverance, and linked it in some way with their child. We may learn how transfiguring and ennobling to the gentlest and weakest is faith in God, especially when it is allied with unselfish human love. These two are the strongest powers. If they are at war, the struggle is terrible: if they are united, 'the weakest is as David, and David as an angel of God.' Let us seek ever to blend their united strength in our own lives.

Will it be thought too fanciful if we suggest that we are taught another lesson,—namely, that the faith which surrenders its earthly treasures to God, in confidence of His care, is generally rewarded and vindicated by receiving them back again, glorified and sanctified by the altar on which they have been laid? Jochebed clasped her recovered darling to her bosom with a deeper gladness, and held him by a surer title, when Miriam brought him back as the princess's charge, than ever before. We never feel the preciousness of dear ones so much, nor are so calm in the joy of possession, as when we have laid them in God's hands, and have learned how wise and wonderful His care is.

III. How much of the world's history that tiny coffer among the reeds held! How different that history would have been if, as might easily have happened, it had floated away, or if the feeble life within it had wailed itself dead unheard! The solemn possibilities folded and slumbering in an infant are always awful to a thoughtful mind. But, except the manger at Bethlehem, did ever cradle hold the seed of so much as did that papyrus chest? The set of opinion at present minimises the importance of the individual, and exalts the spirit of the period, as a factor in history. Standing beside Miriam, we may learn a truer view, and see that great epochs require great men, and that, without such for leaders, no solid advance in the world's progress is achieved. Think of the strange cradle floating on the Nile; then think of the strange grave among the mountains of Moab, and of all between, and ponder the same lesson as is taught in yet higher fashion by

Bethlehem and Calvary, that God's way of blessing the world is to fill men with His message, and let others draw from them. Whether it be 'law,' or 'grace and truth,' a man is needed through whom it may fructify to all.

IV. The sweet picture of womanly compassion in Pharaoh's daughter is full of suggestions. We have already noticed that her name is handed down by one tradition as 'Merris,' and that 'Meri' has been found as the appellation of a princess of the period. A rabbinical authority calls her 'Bithiah,' that is, 'Daughter of Jehovah'; by which was, no doubt, intended to imply that she became in some sense a proselyte. This may have been only an inference from her protection of Moses. There is a singular and very obscure passage in 1 Chronicles iv. 17, 18, relating the genealogy of a certain Mered, who seems to have had two wives, one 'the Jewess,' the other 'Bithiah, the daughter of Pharaoh.' We know no more about him or her, but Keil thinks that Mered probably 'lived before the exodus'; but it can scarcely be that the 'daughter of Pharaoh,' his wife, is our princess, and that she actually became a 'daughter of Jehovah,' and, like her adopted child, refused royal dignity and preferred reproach. In any case, the legend of her name is a tender and beautiful way of putting the belief that in her 'there was some good thing towards the God of Israel.'

But, passing from that, how the true woman's heart changes languid curiosity into tenderness, and how compassion conquesr pride of race and station, as well as regard for her father's edict, as soon as the infant's cry, which touches every good woman's feelings, falls on her ear! 'One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.' All the centuries are as nothing; the strange garb and the stranger mental and spiritual dress fade, and we have here a mere woman, affected, as every true sister of hers to-day would be, by the helpless wailing. God has put that instinct there. Alas that it ever should be choked by frivolity or pride, and frozen by indifference and self-indulgence! Gentle souls spring up in unfavourable soil. Rameses was a strange father for such a daughter. How came this dove in the vulture's cage? Her sweet pity beside his cold craft and cruelty is like the lamb couching by the lion. Note, too, that gentlest pity makes the gentlest brave. She sees the child is a Hebrew. Her quick wit understands why it has been exposed, and she takes its part, and the part of the poor weeping parents, whom she can fancy, against the savage law. No doubt, as Egyptologists tell us, the princesses of the royal house had separate households and abundant liberty of action. Still, it was bold to override the strict commands of such a monarch. But it was not a self-willed sense of power, but the beautiful daring of a compassionate woman, to which God committed the execution of His purposes.

And that is a force which has much like work trusted to it in modern society too. Our great cities swarm with children exposed to a worse fate than the baby among the flags. Legislation and official charity have far too rough hands and too clumsy ways to lift the little life out of the coffer, and to dry the tears. We must look to Christian women to take a leaf out of 'Bithiah's' book. First, they should use their eyes to see the facts, and not be so busy about their own luxury and comfort that they pass the poor pitch-covered box unnoticed. Then they should let the pitiful call touch their heart, and not steel themselves in indifference or ease. Then they should conquer prejudices of race, pride of station, fear of lowering themselves, loathing, or contempt. And then they should yield to the impulses of their compassion, and never mind what difficulties or opponents may stand in the way of their saving the children. If Christian women knew their obligations and their power, and lived up to them as bravely as this Egyptian princess, there would be fewer little ones flung out to be eaten by crocodiles, and many a poor child, who is now abandoned from infancy to the Devil, would be rescued to grow up a servant of God. She, there by the Nile waters, in her gracious pity and prompt wisdom, is the type of what Christian womanhood, and, indeed, the whole Christian community, should be in relation to child life.

V. The great lesson of this incident, as of so much before, is the presence of God's wonderful providence, working out its designs by all the play of human motives. In accordance with a law, often seen in His dealings, it was needful that the deliverer should come from the heart of the system from which he was to set his brethren free. The same principle which sent Saul of Tarsus to be trained at the feet of Gamaliel, and made Luther a monk in the Augustinian convent at Erfurt, planted Moses in Pharaoh's palace and taught him the wisdom of Egypt, against which he was to contend. It was a strange irony of Providence that put him so close to the throne which he was to shake. For his future work he needed to be lifted above his people, and to be familiar with the Egyptian court as well as with Egyptian learning. If he was to hate and to war against idolatry, and to rescue an unwilling people from it, he must know the rottenness of the system, and must have lived close enough to it to know what went on behind the scenes, and how foully it smelled when near. He would gain influence over his countrymen by his connection with Pharaoh, whilst his very separation from them would at once prevent his spirit from being broken by oppression, and would give him a keener sympathy with his people than if he had himself been crushed by slavery. His culture, heathen as it was, supplied the material on which the divine Spirit worked. God fashioned the vessel, and then filled it. Education is not the antagonist of inspiration. For the most part, the men whom God has used for His highest service have been trained in all the wisdom of their age. When it has been piled up into an altar, then 'the fire of the Lord' falls.

Our story teaches us that God's chosen instruments are immortal till their work is done. No matter how forlorn may seem their outlook, how small the probabilities in their favour, how divergent from the goal may seem the road He leads them, He watches them. Around that frail ark, half lost among the reeds, is cast the impregnable shield of His purpose. All things serve that Will. The current in the full river, the lie of the flags that stop it from being borne down, the hour of the princess's bath, the direction of her idle glance, the cry of the child at the right moment, the impulse welling up in her heart, the swift resolve, the innocent diplomacy of the sister, the shelter of the happy mother's breast, the safety of the palace,—all these and a hundred more trivial and unrelated things are spun into the strong cable wherewith God draws slowly but surely His secret purpose into act. So ever His children are secure as long as He has work for them, and His mighty plan strides on to its accomplishment over all the barriers that men can raise.

How deeply this story had impressed on devout minds the truth of the divine protection for all who serve Him, is shown by the fact that the word employed in the last verse of our lesson, and there translated 'drawn,' of which the name 'Moses' is a form, is used on the only occasion of its occurrence in the Old Testament (namely Psalm xviii. 16, and in the duplicate in 2 Sam. xxii. 17) with plain reference to our narrative. The Psalmist describes his own deliverance, in answer to his cry, by a grand manifestation of God's majesty; and this is the climax and the purpose of the earthquake and the lightning, the darkness and the storm: 'He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters.' So that scene by the margin of the Nile, so many years ago, is but one transient instance of the working of the power which secures deliverance from encompassing perils, and for strenuous, though it may be undistinguished, service to all who call upon Him. God, who put the compassion into the heart of Pharaoh's dusky daughter, is not less tender of heart than she, and when He hears us, though our cry be but as of an infant, 'with no language but a cry,' He will come in His majesty and draw us from encompassing dangers and impending death. We cannot all be lawgivers and deliverers; but we may all appeal to His great pity, and partake of deliverance like that of Moses and of David.

THE BUSH THAT BURNED, AND DID NOT BURN OUT

'And, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.'
EXODUS iii. 2.

IT was a very sharp descent from Pharaoh's palace to the wilderness, and forty years of a shepherd's life were a strange contrast to the brilliant future that once seemed likely for Moses. But God tests His weapons before He uses them, and great men are generally prepared for great deeds by great sorrows. Solitude is 'the mother-country of the strong,' and the wilderness, with its savage crags, its awful silence, and the unbroken round of its blue heaven, was a better place to meet God than in the heavy air of a palace, or the profitless splendours of a court.

So as this lonely shepherd is passing slowly in front of his flock, he sees a strange light that asserted itself, even in the brightness of the desert sunshine. 'The bush' does not mean one single shrub. Rather, it implies some little group, or cluster, or copse, of the dry thorny acacias, which are characteristic of the country, and over which any ordinary fire would have passed like a flash, leaving them all in grey ashes. But this steady light persists long enough to draw the attention of the shepherd, and to admit of his travelling some distance to reach it. And then—and then—the Lord speaks.

The significance of this bush, burning but not consumed, is my main subject now, for I think it carries great and blessed lessons for us.

Now, first, I do not think that the bush burning but not consumed, stands as it is ordinarily understood to stand, for the symbolical representation of the preservation of Israel, even in the midst of the fiery furnace of persecution and sorrow.

Beautiful as that idea is, I do not think it is the true explanation; because if so, this symbol is altogether out of keeping with the law that applies to all the rest of the symbolical accompaniments of divine appearances, all of which, without exception, set forth in symbol some truth about God, and not about His Church: and all of which, without exception, are a representation in visible and symbolical form of the same truth which was proclaimed in articulate words along with them. The symbol and the accompanying voice of God in all other cases have one and the same meaning.

That, I think, is the case here also; and we learn from the Bush, not something about God's Church, however precious that may be, but what is a great deal more important, something about God Himself; namely, the same thing that immediately afterwards was spoken in articulate words.

In the next place, let me observe that the fire is distinctly a divine symbol, a symbol of God not of affliction, as the ordinary explanation implies. I need not do more than remind you of the stream of emblem which runs all through Scripture, as confirming this point. There are the smoking lamp and the blazing furnace in the early vision granted to Abraham. There is the pillar of fire by night, that lay over the desert camp of the wandering Israelites. There is Isaiah's word, 'The light of Israel shall be a flaming fire.' There is the whole of the New Testament teaching, turning on the manifestation of God through His Spirit. There are John the Baptist's words, 'He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.' There is the day of Pentecost, when the 'tongues of fire sat upon each of them.' And what is meant by the great word of the Epistle to the Hebrews, 'Our God is a consuming fire'?

Not Israel only, but many other lands—it would scarcely be an exaggeration to say, all other lands—

have used the same emblem with the same meaning. In almost every religion on the face of the earth, you will find a sacred significance attached to fire. That significance is not primarily destruction, as we sometimes suppose, an error which has led to ghastly misunderstandings of some Scriptures, and of the God whom they reveal. When, for instance, Isaiah (xxxiii. 14) asks, 'Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?' he has been supposed to be asking what human soul is there that can endure the terrors of God's consuming and unending wrath. But a little attention to the words would have shown that 'the devouring fire' and the 'everlasting burnings' mean God and not hell, and that the divine nature is by them not represented as too fierce to be approached, but as the true dwelling-place of men, which indeed only the holy can inhabit, but which for them is life. Precisely parallel is the Psalmist's question, 'Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord, and who shall stand in His holy place?'

Fire is the source of warmth, and so, in a sense, of life. It is full of quick energy, it transmutes all kinds of dead matter into its own ruddy likeness, sending up the fat of the sacrifices in wreathes of smoke that aspire heavenward; and changing all the gross, heavy, earthly dullness into flame, more akin to the heaven into which it rises.

Therefore, as cleansing, as the source of life, light, warmth, change, as glorifying, transmuting, purifying, refining, fire is the fitting symbol of the mightiest of all creative energy. And the Bible has consecrated the symbolism, and bade us think of the Lord Himself as the central fiery Spirit of the whole universe, a spark from whom irradiates and vitalises everything that lives.

Nor should we forget, on the other side, that the very felicity of this emblem is, that along with all these blessed thoughts of life-giving and purifying, there does come likewise the more solemn teaching of God's destructive power. 'What maketh heaven, that maketh hell'; and the same God is the fire to quicken, to sanctify, to bless; and resisted, rejected, neglected, is the fire that consumes; the savour of life unto life, or the savour of death unto death.

And then, still further, notice that this flame is undying—steady, unflickering. What does that mean? Adopting the principle which I have already taken as our guide, that the symbol and the following oral revelation teach the same truth, there can be no question as to that answer. 'I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. 'I AM THAT I AM.'

That is to say, the fire that burns and does not burn out, which has no tendency to destruction in its very energy, and is not consumed by its own activity, is surely a symbol of the one Being whose being derives its law and its source from Himself, who only can say —'I AM THAT I AM'—the law of His nature, the foundation of His being, the only conditions of His existence being, as it were, enclosed within the limits of His own nature. You and I have to say, 'I am that which I have become,' or 'I am that which I was born,' or 'I am that which circumstances have made me.' He says, 'I AM THAT I AM.' All other creatures are links; this is the staple from which they all hang. All other being is derived, and therefore limited and changeful; this Being is underived, absolute, self-dependent, and therefore unalterable for evermore. Because we live we die. In living the process is going on of which death is the end. But God lives for evermore, a flame that does not burn out; therefore His resources are inexhaustible, His power unwearied. He needs no rest for recuperation of wasted energy. His gifts diminish not the store which He has to bestow. He gives, and is none the poorer; He works, and is never weary; He operates unspent; He loves, and He loves for ever; and through the ages the fire burns on, unconsumed and undecayed.

O brethren! is not that a revelation—familiar as it sounds to our ears now, blessed be God!—is not that a revelation of which, when we apprehend the depth and the preciousness, we may well fix an unalterable faith upon it, and feel that for us, in our fleeting days and shadowy moments, the one means to secure blessedness, rest, strength, life, is to grasp and knit ourselves to Him who lives for ever, and whose love is lasting as His life? 'The eternal God, the Lord . . . fainteth not, neither is weary. They that wait upon Him shall renew their strength.'

The last thought suggested to me by this symbol is this. Regarding the lowly thorn-bush as an emblem of Israel—which unquestionably it is, though the fire be the symbol of God —in the fact that the symbolical manifestation of the divine energy lived in so lowly a shrine, and flamed in it, and preserved it by its burning, there is a great and blessed truth.

It is the same truth which Jesus Christ, with a depth of interpretation that put to shame the cavilling listeners, found in the words that accompanied this vision: 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' He said to the sneering

Sadducees, who, like all other sneerers, saw only the surface of what they were sarcastic about, 'Did not Moses teach you,' in the section about the bush, 'that the dead rise, when he said: I AM the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob.' A man, about whom it can once be said that God is his God, cannot die. Such a bond can never be broken. The communion of earth, imperfect as it is, is the prophecy of Heaven and the pledge of immortality. And so from that relationship which subsisted between the fathers and God, Christ infers the certainty of their resurrection. It seems a great leap, but there are intervening steps not stated by our Lord, which securely bridge the gulf between the premises and the conclusion. Such communion is, in its very nature, unaffected by the accident of death, for it cannot be supposed that a man who can say that God is *His* God can be reduced to nothingness, and such a bond be snapped by such a cause. Therefore Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still living, 'for all' those whom we call dead, as well as those whom we call living, 'live unto Him,' and though so many centuries have passed, God still *is*, not *was*, their God. The relation between them is eternal and guarantees their immortal life. But immortality without corporeity is not conceivable as the perfect state, and if the dead live still, there must come a time when the whole man shall partake of redemption; and in body, soul, and spirit the glorified and risen saints shall be 'for ever with the Lord.'

That is but the fuller working out of the same truth that is taught us in the symbol 'the bush burned and was not consumed.' God dwelt in it, therefore it flamed; God dwelt in it, therefore though it flamed it never flamed out. Or in other words, the Church, the individual in whom He dwells, partakes of the immortality of the indwelling God. 'Every one shall be salted with fire,' which shall be preservative and not destructive; or, as Christ has said, 'Because I live ye shall live also.'

Humble as was the little, ragged, sapless thorn-bush, springing up and living its solitary life amidst the sands of the desert, it was not too humble to hold God; it was not too gross to burst into flame when He came; it was not too fragile to be gifted with undying being; like His that abode in it. And for us each the emblem may be true. If He dwell in us we shall live as long as He lives, and the fire that He puts in our heart shall be a fountain of fire springing up into life everlasting.

THE CALL OF MOSES

'Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth My people the children of Israel, out of Egypt. 11. And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? 12. And He said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain. 13. And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is His name? what shall I say unto them? 14. And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and He said, thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. 15. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations. 16. Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you, and seen that which is done to you in Egypt: 17. And I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, unto a land flowing with milk and honey. 18. And they shall hearken to thy voice: and thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him, The Lord God of the Hebrews hath met with us: and now let us go, we beseech Thee, three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God. 19. And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand. 20. And I will stretch out my hand, and smite Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go.'—EXODUS iii. 10-20.

THE 'son of Pharaoh's daughter' had been transformed, by nearly forty years of desert life, into an Arab shepherd. The influences of the Egyptian court had faded from him, like colour from cloth exposed to the weather; nor is it probable that, after the failure of his early attempt to play the deliverer to Israel, he nourished further designs of that sort. He appears to have settled down quietly to be Jethro's son-in-law, and to have lived a modest, still life of humble toil. He had flung away fair prospects,—and what had he made of it? The world would say 'Nothing,' as it ever does about those who despise material advantages and covet higher good. Looking after sheep in the desert was a sad downcome from the possibility of sitting on the throne of Egypt. Yes, but it was in the desert that the vision of the bush burning, and not burning out, came; and it would not have come if Moses had been in a palace.

This passage begins in the midst of the divine communication which followed and interpreted the vision. We note, first, the divine charge and the human shrinking from the task. It was a startling transition from verse 9, which declares God's pitying knowledge of Israel's oppression, to verse 10, which thrusts Moses forward into the thick of dangers and difficulties, as God's instrument. 'I will send thee' must have come like a thunder-clap. The commander's summons which brings a man from the rear rank and sets him in the van of a storming-party may well make its receiver shrink. It was not cowardice which prompted Moses' answer, but lowliness. His former impetuous confidence had all been beaten out of him. Time was when he was ready to take up the *rôle* of deliverer at his own hand; but these hot days were past, and age and solitude and communion with God had mellowed him into humility. His recoil was but one instance of the shrinking which all true, devout men feel when designated for tasks which may probably make life short, and will certainly make it hard. All prophets and reformers till to-day have had the same feeling. Men who can do such work as the Jeremiahs, Pauls, Luthers, Cromwells, can do, are never forward to begin it.

Self-confidence is not the temper which God uses for His instruments. He works with 'bruised reeds,' and breathes His strength into them. It is when a man says 'I can do nothing,' that he is fit for God to employ. 'When I am weak, then I am strong.' Moses remembered enough of Egypt to know that it was no slight peril to front Pharaoh, and enough of Israel not to be particularly eager to have the task of leading them. But mark that there is no refusal of the charge, though there is profound consciousness of inadequacy. If we have reason to believe that any duty, great or small, is laid on us by God, it is wholesome that we should drive home to ourselves our own weakness, but not that we should try to shuffle out of the duty because we are weak. Moses' answer was more of a prayer for help than of a remonstrance, and it was answered accordingly.

God deals very gently with conscious weakness. 'Certainly I will be with thee.' Moses' estimate of himself is quite correct, and it is the condition of his obtaining God's help. If he had been self-confident, he would have had no longing for, and no promise of, God's presence. In all our little tasks we may have the same assurance, and, whenever we feel that they are too great for us, the strength of that promise may be ours. God sends no man on errands which He does not give him power to do. So Moses had not to calculate the difference between his feebleness and the strength of a kingdom. Such arithmetic left out one element, which made all the difference in the sum total. 'Pharaoh *versus* Moses' did not look a very hopeful cause, but 'Pharaoh *versus* Moses and Another'—that other being God—was a very different matter. God and I are always stronger than any antagonists. It was needless to discuss whether Moses was able to cope with the king. That was not the right way of putting the problem. The right way was, Is God able to do it?

The sign given to Moses is at first sight singular, inasmuch as it requires faith, and can only be a confirmation of his mission when that mission is well accomplished. But there was a help to present faith even in it, for the very sacredness of the spot hallowed now by the burning bush was a kind of external sign of the promise.

One difficulty being solved, Moses raised another, but not in the spirit of captiousness or reluctance. God is very patient with us when we tell Him the obstacles which we seem to see to our doing His work. As long as these are presented in good faith, and with the wish to have them cleared up, He listens and answers. The second question asked by Moses was eminently reasonable. He pictures to himself his addressing the Israelites, and their question, What is the name of this God who has sent you? Apparently the children of Israel had lost much of their ancestral faith, and probably had in many instances fallen into idolatry. We do not know enough to pronounce with confidence on that point, nor how far the great name of Jehovah had been used before the time of Moses, or had been forgotten in Egypt.

The questions connected with these points and with the history of the name do not enter into our present purpose. My task is rather to point out the religious significance of the self-revelation of God contained in the name, and how it becomes the foundation of Israel's deliverance, existence, and prerogatives. Whatever opinions are adopted as to the correct form of the name and other grammatical and philological questions, there is no doubt that it mainly reveals God as self-existent and unchangeable. He draws His being from no external source, nor 'borrows leave to be.' Creatures are what they are made or grow to be; they are what they were not; they are what they will some time not any more be. But He is what He is. Lifted above time and change, self-existing and self-determined, He is the fountain of life, the same for ever.

This underived, independent, immutable being is a Person who can speak to men, and can say 'I am.' Being such, He has entered into close covenant relations with men, and has permitted Himself to be called 'the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.' The name Jehovah lifts Him high above all creatures; the name 'the God of your fathers' brings Him into tender proximity with men, and, in combination with the former designation, guarantees that He will for ever be what He has been, even to all generations of children's children. That mighty name is, indeed, His 'memorial to all generations,' and is as fresh and full of blessedness to us as to the patriarchs. Christ has made us understand more of the treasures for heart and mind and life which are stored in it. 'Our Father which art in heaven' is the unfolding of its inmost meaning.

We may note that the bush burning but not consumed expressed in symbol the same truth which the name reveals. It seems a mistake to take the bush as the emblem of Israel surviving persecution. Rather the revelation to the eye says the same thing as that to the ear, as is generally the case. As the desert shrub flamed, and yet did not burn away, so that divine nature is not wearied by action nor exhausted by bestowing, nor has its life any tendency towards ending or extinction, as all creatural life has.

The closing verses of this passage (vs. 16-20) are a programme of Moses' mission, in which one or two points deserve notice. First, the general course of it is made known from the beginning. Therein Moses was blessed beyond most of God's servants, who have to risk much and to labour on, not knowing which shall prosper. If we could see, as he did, the lie of the country beforehand, our journeys would be easier. So we often think, but we know enough of what shall be to enable us to have quiet hearts; and it is best for us not to see what is to fail and what to succeed. Our ignorance stimulates effort, and drives to clinging to God's hand.

Then we may note the full assurances to be given to the 'elders of Israel.' Apparently some kind of civic organisation had been kept up, and there were principal people among the slaves who had to be galvanised first into enthusiasm. So they are to be told two things,—that Jehovah has appeared to Moses, and that He, not Moses only, will deliver them and plant them in the land. The enumeration of the many tribes (v. 17) might discourage, but it is intended to fire by the thought of the breadth of the land, which is further described as fertile. The more exalted our conceptions of the inheritance, the more willing shall we be to enter on the pilgrimage towards it. The more we realise that Jehovah has promised to lead us thither, the more willing shall we be to face difficulties and dangers.

The directions as to the opening of communications with Pharaoh have often been made a difficulty, as if there was trickery in the modest request for permission to go three days' journey into the wilderness. But that request was to be made, knowing that it would not be granted. It was to be a test of Pharaoh's willingness to submit to Jehovah. Its very smallness made it so more effectually. If he had any disposition to listen to the voice speaking through Moses, he would yield that small point. It is useless to speculate on what would have happened if he had done so. But probably the Israelites would have come back from their sacrificing.

Of more importance is it to note that the failure of the request was foreseen, and yet the effort was to be made. Is not that the same paradox which meets us in all the divine efforts to win over hard-hearted men to His service? Is it not exactly what our Lord did when He appealed to Judas, while knowing that all would be vain?

The expression in verse 19, 'not by a mighty hand,' is very obscure. It may possibly mean that Pharaoh was so obstinate that no human power was strong enough to bend his will. Therefore, in contrast to the 'mighty hand' of man, which was not mighty enough for this work, God will stretch out His hand, and that will suffice to compel obedience from the proudest. God can force men by His might to comply with His will, so far as external acts go; but He does not regard that as obedience, nor delight in it We can steel ourselves against men's power, but God's hand can crush and break the strongest will. 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.' It is a blessed thing to put ourselves into them, in order to be moulded by their loving touch. The alternative is laid before every soul of man.

A LAST MERCIFUL WARNING

'And the Lord said unto Moses, Yet will I bring one plague more upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go hence: when he shall let you go, he shall surely thrust you out hence altogether. 2. Speak now in the ears of the people, and let every man borrow of his neighbour, and every woman of her neighbour, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold. 3. And the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover, the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants, and in the sight of the people. 4. And Moses said, Thus saith the Lord, About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt: 5. And all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the first-born of the maid-servant that is behind the mill; and all the first-born of beasts. 6. And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be like it any more. 7. But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how that the Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel. 8. And all these thy servants shall come down unto Me, and bow themselves unto Me, saying, Get Thee out, and all the people that follow Thee: and after that I will go out. And he went out from Pharaoh in a great anger. 9. And the Lord said unto Moses, Pharaoh shall not hearken unto you; that My wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt. 10. And Moses and Aaron did all these wonders before Pharaoh: and the Lord hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go out of his land.'—Exodus xi. 1-10.

The first point to be noted in this passage is that it interposes a solemn pause between the preceding ineffectual plagues and the last effectual one. There is an awful lull in the storm before the last crashing hurricane which lays every obstacle flat. 'There is silence in heaven' before the final peal of thunder. Verses 1 to 3 seem, at first sight, out of place, as interrupting the narrative, since Moses' denunciation and prophecy in verses 4 to 8 must have been spoken at the interview with Pharaoh which we find going on at the end of the preceding chapter. But it is legitimate to suppose that, at the very moment when Pharaoh was blustering and threatening, and Moses was bearding him, giving back scorn for scorn, the latter heard with the inward ear the voice which made Pharaoh's words empty wind, and gave him the assurances and commands contained in verses 1 to 3, and that thus it was given him in that hour what he should speak; namely, the prediction that follows in verses 4 to 8. Such a view of the sequence of the passage makes it much more vivid, dramatic, and natural, than to suppose that the first verses are either interpolation or an awkward break referring to a revelation at some indefinite previous moment. When a Pharaoh or a Herod or an Agrippa threatens, God speaks to the heart of a Moses or a Paul, and makes His servant's face 'strong against their faces.'

The same purpose of parting off the preceding plagues from the past ones explains the introduction of verses 9 and 10, which stand as a summary of the whole account of these, and, as it were, draw a line across the page, before beginning the story of that eventful day and night of Israel's deliverance.

Moses' conviction, which he knew to be not his own thought but God's revelation of His purpose, pointed first to the final blow which was to finish Pharaoh's resistance. He had been vacillating between compliance and refusal, like an elastic ball which yields to compression and starts back to its swelling rotundity as soon as the pressure is taken off. But at last he will collapse altogether, like the same ball when a slit is cut in it, and it shrivels into a shapeless lump. Weak people's obstinate fits end like that. He will be as extreme in his eagerness to get rid of the Israelites as he had been in his determination to keep them. The sail that is filled one moment tumbles in a heap the next, when the halyards are cut. It is a poor affair when a man's actions are shaped mainly by fear of consequences. Fright always drives to extremes. 'When he shall let you go, he shall surely thrust you out hence altogether.' Many a stout, God-opposing will collapses altogether when God's finger touches it. 'Can thy heart endure in the days that I shall deal with thee?'

Verses 2 and 3 appear irrelevant here, but the command to collect from the Egyptians jewels, which might be bartered for necessaries, may well have been given to Moses simultaneously with the assurance that he would lead forth the people after the next plague, and the particulars of the people's favour and of Moses' influence in the eyes of the native inhabitants, come in anticipatively to explain why the request for such contributions was granted when made.

With the new divine command swelling in his heart, Moses speaks his last word to Pharaoh, towering above him in righteous wrath, and dwindling his empty threats into nothingness. What a contrast between the impotent rage of the despot, with his vain threat, 'Thou shalt die,' and the unblenching boldness of the man with God at his back! One cannot but note in Moses' prediction of the last plague the solemn enlargement on the details of the widespread calamity, which is not unfeeling gloating over an oppressor's misery, but a yearning to save from hideous misery by timely and plain depicting of it. There is a flash of national triumph in the further contrast between the universal wailing in Egypt and the untouched security of the children of Israel, but that feeling merges at once into the higher one of 'the Lord's' gracious action in establishing the 'difference' between them and their oppressors. It is not safe to dwell on superiority over others, either as to condition or character, unless we print in very large letters that it is 'the Lord' who has made it. There is a flash, too, of natural triumph in the picture of the proud courtiers brought down to prostrate themselves before the shepherd from Horeb, and to pray him to do what their master and they had so long fought against his doing. And there is a most natural assertion of non-dependence on their leave in that emphatic 'After that *I will* go out.' He is not asserting himself against God, but against the cowering courtiers. 'Hot anger' was excusable, but it was not the best mood in which to leave Pharaoh. Better if he had gone out unmoved, or moved only to 'great heaviness and sorrow of heart' at the sight of men setting themselves against God, and rushing on the 'thick bosses of the Almighty's buckler' to their own ruin. Moses' anger we naturally sympathise with, Christ's meekness we should try to copy.

The closing verses, as we have already noticed, are a kind of summing-up of the whole narrative of the plagues and their effects on Pharaoh. They open two difficult questions, as to how and why it was that the effect of the successive strokes was so slight and transient. They give the 'how' very emphatically as being that 'Jehovah hardened Pharaoh's heart.' Does that not free Pharaoh from guilt? And does it not suggest an unworthy conception of God? It must be remembered that the preceding narrative employs not only the phrase that 'Jehovah hardened Pharaoh's heart,' but also the expression that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. And it is further to be noted that the latter expression is employed in the accounts of the earlier plagues, and that the former one appears only towards the close of the series. So then, even if we are to suppose that it means that there was a direct hardening action by God on the man's heart, such action was not first, but subsequent to obstinate hardening by himself. God hardens no man's heart who has not first hardened it himself. But we do not need to conclude that any inward action on the will is meant. Was not the accumulation of plagues, intended, as they were, to soften, a cause of hardening? Does not the Gospel, if rejected, harden, making consciences and wills less susceptible? Is it not a 'savour of death unto death,' as our fathers recognised in speaking of 'gospel-hardened sinners'? The same fire softens wax and hardens clay. Whosoever is not brought near is driven farther off, by the influences which God brings to bear on us.

The 'why' is stated in terms which may suggest difficulties,—'that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt.' But we have to remember that the Old Testament writers are not wont to distinguish so sharply as more logical Westerns do between the actual result of an event and its purpose. With their deep faith in the all-ruling power of God, whatever had come to pass was what He had meant to come to pass. In fact, Pharaoh's obstinacy had not thwarted the divine purpose, but had been the dark background against which the blaze of God's irresistible might had shone the brighter. He makes the wrath of man to praise Him, and turns opposition into the occasion of more conspicuously putting forth His omnipotence.

THE PASSOVER: AN EXPIATION AND A FEAST, A MEMORIAL AND A PROPHECY

'And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, 2. This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you. 3. Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house: 4. And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb. 5. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats: 6. And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening. 7. And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it. 8. And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. 9. Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof. 10. And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire. 11. And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the Lord's passover. 12. For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord. 13. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. 14. And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever.'—EXODUS xii. 1-14.

THE Passover ritual, as appointed here, divides itself into two main parts—the sprinkling of the sacrificial blood on the door-posts and lintels, and the feast on the sacrifice. These can best be dealt with separately. They were separated in the later form of the ritual; for, when there was a central sanctuary, the lambs were slain there, and the blood sprinkled, as in other expiatory sacrifices, on the altar, while the domestic feast remained unaltered. The former was more especially meant to preserve the Israelites from the destruction of their first-born; the latter as a permanent memorial of their deliverance. But both have perpetual fitness as prophetic of varying aspects of the Christian redemption.

I. The ritual of the protecting blood.

In the hurry and agitation of that eventful day, it must have seemed strange to the excited people that they should be called upon to observe such a service. But its institution at that crisis is in accordance with the whole tone of the story of the Exodus, in which man is nothing and God all. Surely, never was national deliverance effected so absolutely without effort or blow struck. If we try to realise the state of mind of the Israelites on that night, we shall feel how significant of the true nature of their deliverance this summons to an act of worship, in the midst of their hurry, must have been.

The domestic character of the rite is its first marked feature. Of course, there were neither temple nor priests then; but that does not wholly account for the provision that every household, unless too few in number to consume a whole lamb, should have its own sacrifice, slain by its head. The first purpose of the rite, to provide for the safety of each house by the sprinkled blood, partly explains it; but the deepest reason is, no doubt, the witness which was thereby borne to the universal priesthood of the nation. The patriarchal order made each man the priest of his house. This rite, which lay at the foundation of Israel's nationality, proclaimed that a restricted priestly class was a later expedient. The primitive formation crops out here, as witness that, even where hid beneath later deposits, it underlies them all.

We have called the Passover a sacrifice. That has been disputed, but unreasonably. No doubt, it was a peculiar kind of sacrifice, unlike those of the later ritual in many respects, and scarcely capable of being classified among them. But it is important to keep its strictly sacrificial character in view; for it is essential to its meaning and to its typical aspect. The proofs of its sacrificial nature are abundant. The instructions as to the selection of the lamb; the method of disposing of the blood, which was sprinkled with hyssop—a peculiarly sacrificial usage; the treatment of the remainder after the feast; the very feast itself,—all testify that it was a sacrifice in the most accurate use of the word. The designation of it as 'a passover to the Lord,' and in set terms as a 'sacrifice,' in verse 27 and elsewhere, to say nothing of its later form when it became a regular Temple sacrifice, or of Paul's distinct language in 1 Corinthians v. 7, or of Peter's quotation of the very words of verse 5, applied to Christ, 'a lamb without blemish,' all point in the same direction.

But if a sacrifice, what kind of sacrifice was it? Clearly, the first purpose was that the blood might be sprinkled on the door-posts and lintels, and so the house be safe when the destroying angel passed through the land. Such is the explanation given in verse 13, which is the divine declaration of its meaning. This is the centre of the rite; from it the name was derived. Whether readers accept the doctrines of substitution and expiation or not, it ought to be impossible for an honest reader of these verses to deny that these doctrines or thoughts are there. They may be only the barbarous notions of a half-savage age and people. But, whatever they are, there they are. The lamb without blemish carefully chosen and kept for four days, till it had become as it were part of the household, and then solemnly slain by the head of the family, was their representative. When they sprinkled its blood on the posts, they confessed that they stood in peril of the destroying angel by reason of their impurity, and they presented the blood as their expiation. In so far, their act was an act of confession, deprecation, and faith. It accepted the divinely appointed means of safety. The consequence was exemption from the fatal stroke, which fell on all homes from the palace to the slaves' hovel, where that red streak was not found. If any son of Abraham had despised the provision for safety, he would have been partaker of the plague.

All this refers only to exemption from outward punishment, and we are not obliged to attribute to these terrified bondmen any higher thoughts. But clearly their obedience to the command implied a measure of belief in the divine voice; and the command embodied, though in application to a transient judgment, the broad principles of sacrificial substitution, of expiation by blood, and of safety by the individual application of that shed blood.

In other words, the Passover is a Gospel before the Gospel. We are sometimes told that in its sacrificial ideas Christianity is still dressing itself in 'Hebrew old clothes.' We believe, on the contrary, that the whole sacrificial system of Judaism had for its highest purpose to shadow forth the coming redemption. Christ is not spoken of as 'our Passover,' because the Mosaic ritual had happened to have that ceremonial; but the Mosaic ritual had that ceremonial mainly because Christ is our Passover, and, by His blood shed on the Cross and sprinkled on our consciences, does in spiritual reality that which the Jewish Passover only did in outward form. All other questions about the Old Testament, however interesting and hotly contested, are of secondary importance compared with this. Is its chief purpose to prophesy of Christ, His atoning death, His kingdom and church, or is it not? The New Testament has no doubt of the answer. The Evangelist John finds in the singular swiftness of our Lord's death, which secured the exemption of His sacred body from the violence inflicted on His fellow-sufferers, a fulfilment of the paschal injunction that not a bone should be broken; and so, by one passing allusion, shows that he recognised Christ as the true Passover. John the Baptist's rapturous exclamation, 'Behold the Lamb of God!' blends allusions to the Passover, the daily sacrifice, and Isaiah's great prophecy. The day of the Crucifixion, regarded as fixed by divine Providence, may be taken as God's own finger pointing to the Lamb whom He has provided. Paul's language already referred to attests the same truth. And even the last lofty visions of the Apocalypse, where the old man in Patmos so touchingly recurs to the earliest words which brought him to Jesus, echo the same conviction, and disclose, amidst the glories of the throne, 'a Lamb as it had been slain.'

II. The festal meal on the sacrifice.

After the sprinkling of the blood came the feast. Only when the house was secure from the destruction which walked in the darkness of that fateful night, could a delivered household gather round the board. That which had become their safety now became their food. Other sacrifices were, at a later period, modelled on the same type; and in all cases the symbolism is the same, namely, joyful participation in the sacrifice, and communion with God based upon expiation. In the Passover, this second stage received for future ages the further meaning of a memorial. But on that first night it was only such by anticipation, seeing that it preceded the deliverance which it was afterwards to commemorate.

The manner of preparing the feast and the manner of partaking of it are both significant. The former provided that the lamb should be roasted, not boiled, apparently in order to secure its being kept whole; and the same purpose suggested the other prescriptions that it was to be served up entire, and with bones unbroken. The reason for this seems to be that thus the unity of the partakers was more plainly shown. All ate of one undivided whole, and were thus, in a real sense, one. So the Apostle deduces the unity of the Church from the oneness of the bread of which they in the Christian Passover partake.

It was to be eaten with the accompaniments of bitter herbs, usually explained as memorials of the bondage, which had made the lives bitter, and the remembrance of which would sweeten their deliverance, even as the pungent condiments brought out the savour of the food. The further accompaniment of unleavened bread seems to have the same signification as the appointment that they were to eat with their garments gathered round their loins, their feet shod, and staves in hand. All these were partly necessities in their urgent hurry, and partly a dramatic representation for later days of the very scene of the first Passover. A strange feast indeed, held while the beat of the pinions of the destroying angel could almost be heard, devoured in hot haste by anxious men standing ready for a perilous journey, the end whereof none knew! The gladness would be strangely dashed with terror and foreboding. Truly, though they feasted on a sacrifice, they had bitter herbs with it, and, standing, swallowed their portions, expecting every moment to be summoned to the march.

The Passover as a feast is a prophecy of the great Sacrifice, by virtue of whose sprinkled blood we all may be sheltered from the sweep of the divine judgment, and on which we all have to feed if there is to be any life in us. Our propitiation is our food. 'Christ for us' must become 'Christ in us,' received and appropriated by our faith as the strength of our lives. The Christian life is meant to be a joyful feast on the Sacrifice, and communion with God based upon it. We feast on Christ when the mind feeds on Him as truth, when the heart is filled and satisfied with His love, when the conscience clings to Him as its peace, when the will esteems the 'words of His mouth more than' its 'necessary food,' when all desires, hopes, and inward powers draw their supplies from Him, and find their object in His sweet sufficiency.

Nor will the accompaniments of the first Passover be wanting. Here we feast in the night; the dawn will bring freedom and escape. Here we eat the glad Bread of God, not unseasoned with bitter herbs of sorrow and memories of the bondage, whose chains are dropping from our uplifted hands. Here we should partake of that hidden nourishment, in such manner that it hinders not our readiness for outward service. It is not yet time to sit at His table, but to stand with loins girt, and feet shod, and hands grasping the pilgrim staff. Here we are to eat for strength, and to blend with our secret hours of meditation the holy activities of the pilgrim life.

That feast was, further, appointed with a view to its future use as a memorial. It was held before the deliverance which it commemorated had been accomplished. A new era was to be reckoned from it. The month of the Exodus was thenceforward to be the first of the year. The memorial purpose of the rite has been accomplished. All over the world it is still observed, so many hundred years after its institution, being thus, probably, the oldest religious ceremonial in existence. Once more aliens in many lands, the Jewish race still, year by year, celebrate that deliverance, so tragically unlike their homeless present, and with indomitable hope, at each successive celebration, repeat the expectation, so long cherished in vain, 'This year, here; next year, in the land of Israel. This year, slaves; next year, freemen.' There can be few stronger attestations of historical events than the keeping of days commemorating them, if traced back to the event they commemorate. So this Passover, like Guy Fawkes' Day in England, or Thanksgiving Day in America, remains for a witness even now.

What an incomprehensible stretch of authority Christ put forth, if He were no more than a teacher, when He brushed aside the Passover, and put in its place the Lord's Supper, as commemorating His own death! Thereby He said, 'Forget that past deliverance; instead, remember Me.' Surely this was either audacity approaching insanity, or divine consciousness that He Himself was the true Paschal Lamb, whose blood shields the world from judgment, and on whom the world may feast and be satisfied. Christ's deliberate intention to represent His death as expiation, and to fix the reverential, grateful gaze of all future ages on His Cross, cannot be eliminated from His founding of that memorial rite in substitution for the God-appointed ceremonial, so hoary with age and sacred in its significance. Like the Passover, the Lord's Supper was established before the deliverance was accomplished. It remains a witness at once of the historical fact of the death of Jesus, and of the meaning and power which Jesus Himself bade us to see in that death. For us, redeemed by His blood, the past should be filled with His sacrifice. For us, fed on Himself, all the present should be communion with Him, based upon His death for us. For us, freed bondmen, the memorial of deliverance begun by His Cross should be the prophecy of deliverance to be completed at the side of His throne, and the hasty meal, eaten with bitter herbs, the adumbration of the feast when all the pilgrims shall sit with Him at His table in His kingdom. Past, present, and future should all be to us saturated with Jesus Christ. Memory should furnish hope with colours, canvas, and subjects for her fair pictures, and both be fixed on 'Christ our Passover, sacrificed for us.'

THOUGHT, DEED, WORD

'It shall be for a sign unto thee upon thine hand, and for a memorial between thine eyes, that the Lord's law may be in thy mouth.'—EXODUS xiii. 9.

THE question may be asked, whether this command is to be taken metaphorically or literally. No doubt the remembrance of the great deliverance was intrusted to acts. Besides the annual Passover feasts, inscriptions on the door-posts and fringes on the dress were appointed for this purpose. And the Jews from a very early period, certainly before our Lord's time, wore phylacteries fastened, as this and other places prescribe, on the left arm and on the forehead, and alleged these words as the commandment which they therein obeyed. But it seems more probable that the meaning is metaphorical, and that what is enjoined is rather a constant remembrance of the great deliverance, and a constant regulation of the practical life by it. For what is it that is to be 'a sign'? It is the Passover feast. And the 'therefore' of the next verse seems to say that keeping this ordinance in its season is the fulfilment of this precept. Besides, the expression 'for a sign,' 'for a memorial,' may just as well mean 'it shall serve as,' or 'it shall be like,' as 'you shall wear.' So I think we must say that this is a figure, not a fact; the enjoining of an object for thought and a motive for life, not of a formal observance. And it is very characteristic of the Jew, and of the universal tendency to harden and lower religion into outward rites, that a command so wide and profound was supposed to be kept by fastening little boxes with four slips of parchment containing extracts from the Pentateuch on arm and forehead. Jewish rabbis are not the only people who treat God's law like that. Even if literal, the injunction is for the purpose of remembering. Taking that meaning, then, the text sets forth principles that apply quite as much to us. You will observe 'hand,' 'eyes,' 'mouth'; the symbols of practice, knowledge, expression; work, thought, and word. Observe also that there is a slight change in construction in the three clauses; the two former are to be done in order that the latter may come to pass. Then the memorial of the great deliverance is to be 'on the hand' and 'before the eyes,' in order that 'the Lord's law' may be 'in the mouth' Keeping these points in view—

I. God's great deliverance should be constantly before our thoughts.

It is more than an accident that both Judaism and Christianity should begin with a great act of deliverance; that that act of deliverance should constitute a community, and that a memorial rite should be the centre of the ritual of both. The Lord's Supper historically took the place of the Passover. It was instituted at the Passover and instead of it. It is precisely the same in design, a memorial feast appointed to keep up the vivid remembrance of the historical fact to which redemption is traced; and not only to keep up its remembrance, but to proclaim the importance of extending that remembrance through all life.

Notice the peculiarity of both the Jewish and the Christian rite, that the centre point of both is a historical fact, a redeeming act. Judaism and Christianity are the only religions in regard to which this is true to anything like the same extent or in the same way. Christianity as a revelation is not so much the utterance in words of great religious thoughts as the history of a life and a death, a fact wrought upon the earth, which is at once the means of revelation and the means of redemption. This is a feature unshared by other religions.

This characteristic determines the principal object of our religious thought. The true object for religious thought is Christ, and His life and death.

All religious truth flows from and is wrapped up in that: *e.g.* theology, or the nature of God; anthropology, or the nature of man; soteriology, morality, etc. All truth for the individual and for the race has its source in God's great redeeming act. Religious emotion is best fed at this source, *e.g.* thankfulness, wonder, love: all these transcendent feelings which are melted together in adoration. Here is where they are kindled. You cannot pump them up, or bring them into existence by willing, or scourge yourself into them, any more than you can make a seed grow by pulling at the germ with a pair of pincers, but this gives the warmth and moisture which make it germinate.

The clear perception of this truth is valuable, as correcting false tendencies in religion, *e.g.* the tendency to be much occupied with the derived truths, and to think of them almost to the exclusion of the great fact from which they come; the tendency to substitute melancholy self-inspection for objective facts; the tendency to run out into mere feeling.

The command requires of us a habitual occupation of mind with the great deliverance.

And the habitual presence of this thought will be best secured by specific times of occupation with it. Let every Christian practise the habit of meditation, which in an age of so many books, newspapers, and the distractions of our busy modern life, is apt to become obsolete

II. The great deliverance is to be ever present in practical life.

The 'hand' is clearly the seat and home of power and practical effort. So the remembrance is to be present and to preside over our practical work.

How it is fitted to do so.

(*a*) It gives the law for all our activity.

The pattern. The death as well as the life of Christ teaches us what we ought to be.

The motive. He died for me! Shall I not serve Him who redeemed me?

(*b*) That remembered deliverance arms us against temptations, and lifts us above sinking into sin.

How blessed such a life would be! How victorious over the small motives that rule one's life, the deadening influence of routine, the duties that are felt to be overwhelmingly great and those that are felt to be wearisomely and monotonously small! How this unity of motive would give unity to life and simplify its problems! How it would free us from many a perplexity! There are so many things that seem doubtful because we do not bring the test of the highest motive to bear on them. Complications would fall away when we only wished to know and be like Christ. Many a tempting amusement, or occupation, or speculation would start up in its own shape when this Ithuriel spear touched it. How it would save from distractions! How strong it would make us, like a belt round the waist bracing the muscles tighter! 'This one thing I do' is always a strengthening principle.

How far is this possible? Not absolutely, but we may approximate very closely and indefinitely towards it. For there is the possibility of such thought blending with common motives, like a finer perfume in the scentless air, or some richer elixir in a cup. There is the possibility of its doing to other motives what light does to landscape when a sudden sunbeam gleams across the plain, and everything leaps into increased depth of colour. Let us try more and more to rescue life from the slavery of habit and the distractions of all these smaller forces, and to bring it into the greatness and power of submission to the dominion of this sovereign, unifying motive. Our lives would thus be greatened and strengthened, even as Germany and Italy have been, by being delivered from a rabble of petty dukes and brought under the sway of one emperor or king. Let us try to approach nearer and nearer to the fusion of action and contemplation, and to the blending with all other motives of this supreme one.

This command supplies us with an easily applied and effective test. Is there any place where you cannot take it, any act which you feel it would be impossible to do for His sake? Avoid such. Where the safety-lamp burns blue and goes out, is no place for you.

It is a beautiful thought that Jesus does for us what we are thus commanded to do for Him The high priest bore the names of the tribes on his shoulders and in his heart. 'I have graven thee on the palms of my hands.' We bear Him in our hands and in our hearts. 'I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.'

III. The great deliverance is to be ever on our lips.

The three regions here named are the inward thought, the outward practice, and the testimony of the lips. Note that that testimony is a consequence of thought and practice.

1. The purpose of the deliverance is to make 'prophets of His law.' Such was the divine intention as to Israel. Such is God's purpose as to all Christians. The very meaning of redemption is there. He has 'opened our lips' that we 'should show forth His praise.' He has regard to 'His own name.' He desires to make us vocal, for the same purpose for which a man strings a harp, to bring sweet music out of it. Words of testimony are a form of love.

2. The other two are incomplete without this vocal testimony.

3. The utterance of the lips, to be worth anything, must rest on and follow the other two. How noble, then, and blessed, how strong and calm and simple our lives would be, if we had this for the one great

object of our thoughts, of our practical endeavour, of our words, if all our being was sustained, impelled, made vocal, by one thought, one love!

O my brother, see to it that you give yourself to Him. That great Light will gladden your eyes, will guide your activity, and, like the sunrise striking Memnon's voiceless, stony lips, will bring music. Thought will have one boundless home of 'many mansions.' Work will have one law, one motive, its consecration and strength; and as in some solemn procession, all our steps and all our movements will keep time to the music of our praise to 'Him who loved us.'

A PATH IN THE SEA

'And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: 20. And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night. 21. And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. 22. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. 23. And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. 24. And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the Lord looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians, 25. And took off their chariot-wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the Lord fighteth for them against the Egyptians. 26. And the Lord said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. 27. And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. 28. And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them: there remained not so much as one of them. 29. But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. 30. Thus the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore. 31. And Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord, and His servant Moses.'—EXODUS xiv. 19-31.

THIS passage begins at the point where the fierce charge of the Egyptian chariots and cavalry on the straggling masses of the fugitives is inexplicably arrested. The weary day's march, which must have seemed as suicidal to the Israelites as it did to their pursuers, had ended in bringing them into a position where, as Luther puts it, they were like a mouse in a trap or a partridge in a snare. The desert, the sea, the enemy, were their alternatives. And, as they camped, they saw in the distance the rapid advance of the dreaded force of chariots, probably the vanguard of an army. No wonder that they lost heart. Moses alone keeps his head and his faith. He is rewarded with the fuller promise of deliverance, and receives the power accompanying the command, to stretch forth his hand, and part the sea. Then begins the marvellous series of incidents here recorded.

I. The first step in the leisurely march of the divine deliverance is the provision for checking the Egyptian advance and securing the safe breaking up of the Israelitish camp. The pursuers had been coming whirling along at full speed, and would soon have been amongst the disorderly mass, dealing destruction. There was no possibility of getting the crossing effected unless they were held at bay. When an army has to ford a river in the face of hostile forces, the hazardous operation is possible only if a strong rearguard is left on the enemy's side, to cover the passage. This is exactly what is done here. The pillar of fire and cloud, the symbol of the divine presence, passed from the van to the rear. Its guidance was not needed, when but one path through the sea was possible. Its defence was needed when the foe was pressing eagerly on the heels of the host. His people's needs determined then, as they ever do, the form of the divine presence and help. Long after, the prophet seized the great lesson of this event, when he broke into the triumphant anticipation of a yet future deliverance,—which should repeat in fresh experience the ancient victory, 'The Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rearward.' In the place where the need is sorest, and in the form most required, there and that will God ever be to those who trust Him.

We can see here, too, a frequent characteristic of the miraculous element in Scripture, namely, its reaching its end not by a leap, but by a process. Once admit miracle, and it appears as if adaptation of means to ends was unnecessary. It would have been as easy to have transported the Israelites bodily and instantaneously to the other side of the sea, as to have taken these precautions and then cleft the ocean, and made them march through it. Legendary miracle would have preferred the former way. The Bible miracle usually adapts methods to aims, and is content to travel to its goal step by step.

Nor can we omit to notice the double effect of the one manifestation of the divine presence. The same pillar was light and darkness. The side which was cloud was turned to the pursuers; that which was light, to Israel. The former were paralysed, and hindered from advancing a step, or from seeing what the latter were doing; these, on the other hand, had light thrown on their strange path, and were encouraged and helped to plunge into the mysterious road, by the ruddy gleam which disclosed it. So every revelation is either light or darkness to men, according to the use they make of it. The ark, which slew Philistines, and flung Dagon prone on his own threshold, brought blessing to the house of Obededom. The

Child who was to be 'set for the fall,' was also for 'the rising of many.' The stone laid in Zion is 'a sure foundation,' and 'a stone of stumbling.' The Gospel is the savour of life unto life, or of death unto death. The same fire melts wax and hardens clay. The same Christ is salvation and destruction. God is to each of us either our joy or our dread.

II. The sudden march of the Egyptians having thus been arrested, there is leisure, behind the shelter of the fiery barrier, to take the next step in the deliverance. The sea is not divided in a moment. Again, we have a process to note, and that brought about by two things,—Moses' outstretched rod, and the strong wind which blew all night. The chronology of that fateful night is difficult to adjust from our narrative. It would appear, from verse 20, that the Egyptians were barred advancing until morning; and, from verse 21, that the wind which ploughed with its strong ploughshare a furrow through the sea, took all night for its work. But, on the other hand, the Israelites must have been well across, and the Egyptians in the very midst of the passage, 'in the morning watch,' and all was over soon after 'the morning appeared.' Probably the wind continued all the night, so as to keep up the pressure which dammed back the waters, but the path was passable some hours before the gale abated. It must have been a broad way to admit of some two million frightened people with wives and children effecting a crossing in the short hours of part of one night.

But though God used the wind as His besom to sweep a road clear for His people, the effect produced by ordinary means was extraordinary. No wind that ever blew would blow water in two opposite directions at once. as a man might shovel snow to right and left, and heap it in mounds by the sides of the path that he dug. That was what the text tells us was done. The miracle is none the less a miracle because God employed physical agents, just as Christ's miracles were no less miraculous when He anointed blind eyes with moistened clay, or sent men to wash in Siloam, than when His bare word raised the dead or stilled the ocean. Wind or no wind, Moses' rod or no rod, the true explanation of that broad path cleared through the sea is—'the waters saw Thee, O God.' The use of natural means may have been an aid to feeble faith, encouraging it to step down on to the untrodden and slippery road. The employment of Moses and his rod was to attest his commission to act as God's mouthpiece.

III. Then comes the safe passage. It is hard to imagine the scene. The vivid impression made by our story is all the more remarkable when we notice how wanting in detail it is. We do not know the time nor the place. We have no information about how the fugitives got across, the breadth of the path, or its length. Characteristically enough, Jewish legends know all about both, and assure us that the waters were parted into twelve ways, one for each tribe, and that the length of the road was three hundred miles! But Scripture, with characteristic reticence, is silent about all but the fact. That is enough. We gather, from the much later and poetical picture of it in Psalm lxxvii., that the passage was accomplished in the midst of crashing thunder and flashing lightnings; though it may be doubted whether these are meant to be taken as real or ideal. At all events, we have to think of these two millions of people—women, children, and followers — plunging into the depths in the night.

What a scene! The awestruck crowds, the howling wind, perhaps the thunderstorm, the glow of the pillar glistening on the wet and slimy way, the full paschal moon shining on the heaped waters! How the awe and the hope must both have increased with each step deeper in the abyss, and nearer to safety! The Epistle to the Hebrews takes this as an instance of 'faith' on the part of the Israelites; and truly we can feel that it must have taken some trust in God's protecting hand to venture on such a road, where, at any moment, the walls might collapse and drown them all. They were driven to venture by their fear of Pharaoh; but faith, as well as fear, wrought in them. Our faith, too, is often called upon to venture upon perilous paths. We may trust Him to hold back the watery walls from falling. The picture of the crossing carries eternal truth for us all. The way of safety does not open till we are hemmed in, and Pharaoh's chariots are almost come up. It often leads into the very thick of what we deem perils. It often has to be ventured on in the dark, and with the wind in our faces. But if we tread it in faith, the fluid will be made solid, and the pathless passable, or any other apparent impossibility be realised, before our confidence shall be put to shame, or one real evil reach us.

IV. The next stage is the hot pursuit and the panic of the Egyptians. The narrative does not mark the point at which the pillar lifted and disclosed the escape of the prey. It must have been in the night. The baffled pursuers dash after them, either not seeing, or too excited and furious to heed where they were going. The rough sea bottom was no place for chariots, and they would be hopelessly distanced by the fugitives on foot. How long they stumbled and weltered we are not told, but 'in the morning watch,' that is, while it was yet dark, some awful movement in the fiery pillar awed even their anger into stillness, and drove home the conviction that they were fighting against God. There is something very terrible in the vagueness, if we may call it so, of that phrase 'the Lord looked . . . through the pillar.' It curdles the blood as no minuteness of narrative would do. And what a thought that His look should be a trouble! 'The steady whole of the judge's face' is awful, and some creeping terror laid hold on that host of mad pursuers floundering in the dark, as that more than natural light flared on their path. The panic to which all bodies of soldiers in strange circumstances are exposed, was increased by the growing difficulty of advance, as the chariot wheels became clogged or the ground more of quicksand. At last it culminates in a shout of '*Sauve qui peut!*' We may learn how close together lie daring rebellion against God and abject terror of Him; and how in a moment, a glance of His face, a turn of His hand, bring the wildest blasphemer to cower in fear. We may learn, too, to keep clear of courses which cannot be followed a moment longer, if once a thought that God sees us comes in. And we may learn the miserable result of all departure from Him, in making what ought to be our peace and blessing, our misery and terror, and turning the brightness of His face into a consuming fire.

V. Then comes, at last, the awful act of destruction, of which a man is the agent and an army the victim. We must suppose the Israelites all safe on the Arabian coast, when the level sunlight streams from the east on the wild hurry of the fleeing crowd making for the Egyptian shore. What a solemn sight that young morning looked on! The wind had dropped, the rod is stretched out, the sea returns to its strength; and after a few moments' despairing struggle all is over, and the sun, as it climbs, looks down upon the unbroken stretch of quiet sea, bearing no trace of the awful work which it had done, or of the quenched hatred and fury which slept beneath.

We can understand the stern joy which throbs so vehemently in every pulse of that great song, the first blossom of Hebrew poetry, which the ransomed people sang that day. We can sympathise with the many echoes in psalm and prophecy, which repeated the lessons of faith and gratitude. But some will be ready to ask, Was that triumphant song anything more than narrow national feeling, and has Christianity not taught us another and tenderer thought of God than that which this lesson carries? We may ask in return, Was it divine providence that swept the Spanish Armada from the sea, fulfilling, as the medal struck to commemorate it bore, the very words of Moses' song, 'Thou didst blow with Thy wind, the sea covered them'? Was it God who overwhelmed Napoleon's army in the Russian snows? Were these, and many like acts in the world's history, causes for thankfulness to God? Is it not true that, as has been well said, 'The history of the world is the judgment of the world'? And does Christianity forbid us to rejoice when some mighty and ancient system of wrong and oppression, with its tools and accomplices, is cleared from off the face of the earth? 'When the wicked perish, there is shouting.' Let us not forget that the love and gentleness of the Gospel are accompanied by the revelation of divine judgment and righteous retribution. This very incident has for its last echo in

Scripture that wonderful scene in the Apocalypse, where, in the pause before the seven angels bearing the seven plagues go forth, the seer beholds a company of choristers, like those who on that morning stood on the Red Sea shore, standing on the bank of the 'sea of glass mingled with fire,'—which symbolises the clear and crystalline depth of the stable divine judgments, shot with fiery retribution,—and lifting up by anticipation a song of thanksgiving for the judgments about to be wrought. That song is expressly called 'the song of Moses' and 'of the Lamb,' in token of the essential unity of the two dispensations, and especially of the harmony of both in their view of the divine judgments. Its ringing praises are modelled on the ancient lyric. It, too, triumphs in God's judgments, regards them as means of making known His name, as done not for destruction, but that His character may be known and honoured by men, to whom it is life and peace to know and love Him for what He is.

That final victory over 'the beast,' whether he be a person or a tendency, is to reproduce in higher fashion that old conquest by the Red Sea. There is hope for the world that its oppressors shall not always tyrannise; there is hope for each soul that, if we take Christ for our deliverer and our guide, He will break the chains from off our wrists, and bring us at last to the eternal shore, where we may stand, like the ransomed people, and, as the unsetting morning dawns, see its beams touching with golden light the calm ocean, beneath which our oppressors lie buried for ever, and lift up glad thanksgivings to Him who has 'led us through fire and through water, and brought us out into a wealthy place.'

'MY STRENGTH AND SONG'

'The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation. . . .'
EXODUS xv. 2.

THESE words occur three times in the Bible: here, in Isaiah xii. 2, and in Psalm cxviii. 14.

I. The lessons from the various instances of their occurrence. The first and second teach that the Mosaic deliverance is a picture-prophecy of the redemption in Christ. The third (Psalm cxviii. 14), long after, and the utterance of some private person, teaches that each age and each soul has the same mighty Hand working for it. 'As we have heard, so have we seen.'

II. The lessons from the words themselves.

(*a*) True faith appropriates God's universal mercy as a personal possession. '*My* Lord and *my* God!' 'He loved *me*, and gave Himself for *me*.'

(*b*) Each single act of mercy should reveal God more clearly as 'My strength.' The 'and' in the second clause is substantially equivalent to 'for.' It assigns the reason for the assurance expressed in the first. Because of the experienced deliverance and God's manifestation of Himself in it as the author of 'salvation,' my faith wins happy increase of confidence that He 'is the strength of my heart.' Blessed they who bring that treasure out of all the sorrows of life!

(*c*) The end of His deliverances is 'praise.' 'He is my song.' This is true for earth and for heaven. The 'Song of Moses and the Lamb.'

THE SHEPHERD AND THE FOLD

'. . . Thou hast guided them in Thy strength unto Thy holy habitation.'
EXODUS xv. 13.

WHAT a grand triumphal ode! The picture of Moses and the children of Israel singing, and Miriam and the women answering: a gush of national pride and of worship! We belong to a better time, but still we can feel its grandeur. The deliverance has made the singer look forward to the end, and his confidence in the issue is confirmed.

I. The guiding God: or the picture of the leading. The original is 'lead gently.' *Cf.* Isaiah xl. 11, Psalm xxiii. 2. The emblem of a flock underlies the word. There is not only guidance, but gentle guidance. The guidance was gentle, though accompanied with so tremendous and heart-curdling a judgment. The drowned Egyptians were strange examples of gentle leading. But God's redemptive acts are like the guiding pillar of fire, in that they have a side that reveals wrath and evokes terror, and a side that radiates lambent love and kindles happy trust.

'In Thy strength.' *Cf.* Isaiah xl. 10, 'with strong hand.' 'He shall gently lead.' Note the combination with gentleness. That divine strength is the only power which is able to guide. We are so weak that it takes all His might to hold us up. It is His strength, not ours. 'My strength is made perfect in (thy) weakness.'

'To the resting-place of Thy holiness.' The word is used for pasture, or resting-places for cattle. Here it meant Canaan; for us it means Heaven—'the green pastures' of real participation in His holiness.

II. The triumphant confidence as to the future based upon the deliverance of the past. '*Hast*,' a past tense. It is as good as done. The believing use of God's great past, and initial mercy, to make us sure of His future.

(*a*) In that He will certainly accomplish it.

(*b*) In that even now there is a foretaste—rest in toil. He guides to the 'waters of resting.' A rest now (Heb. iv. 3); a rest 'that remaineth' (Heb. iv. 3, 9).

III. The warning against confidence in self. These people who sang thus perished in the wilderness! They let go hold of God's hand, so they 'sank like lead.' So He will fulfil begun work (Philippians i. 6). Let us cleave to Him. In Hebrews iii. and iv. lessons are drawn from the Israelites not 'entering in.' See also Psalm xcv.

THE ULTIMATE HOPE

'Thou shalt bring them in and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance. . . .'—Exodus xv. 17.

I. The lesson taught by each present deliverance and kindness is that we shall be brought to His rest at last.

(*a*) Daily mercies are a pledge and a pattern of His continuous acts. The confidence that we shall be kept is based upon no hard doctrine of final perseverance, but on the assurance that God is always the same, like the sunshine which has poured out for all these millenniums and still rushes on with the same force. Consider—

The inexhaustibleness of the divine resources.

The steadfastness of the divine purposes.

The long-suffering of the divine patience.

(*b*) Thus daily mercies should lead on our thoughts to heavenly things. They should not prison us in their own sweetness. We should see the great Future shining through them as a transparent, not an opaque medium.

(*c*) That ultimate future should be the great object of our hope. Surely it is chiefly in order that we may have the light of that great to-morrow brightening and magnifying our dusty to-days, that we are endowed with the faculty of looking forward and 'calling things that are not as though they were.' So we should engage and enlarge our minds with it.

II. The form which that ultimate future assumes.

The Israelites thought of Canaan, and in particular of 'Zion,' its centre-point (*a*) Perpetual rest. 'Bring in and plant'—a contrast to the desert nomad life.

(*b*) Perpetual safety. 'The sanctuary which Thy hands have established,' *i.e.* made firm.

(*c*) Perpetual dwelling in God. 'Thy dwelling,' 'Thy mountain,' '*Thy* holy habitation' (ver. 13), rather than '*our* land.' For Israel their communion with Jehovah was perfected on Zion by the Temple and the sacrifices, including the revelation of (priestly) national service.

(*d*) Perpetual purity. 'Thy sanctuary.' 'Without' holiness 'no man shall see the Lord.'

MARAH

'And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah. 24. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? 25. And he cried unto the Lord; and the Lord showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet. . . .'—EXODUS xv. 23-25.

I. THE time of reaching Marah—just after the Red Sea. The Israelites were encamped for a few days on the shore to shake themselves together, and then at this, their very first station, they began to experience the privations which were to be their lot for forty years. Their course was like that of a ship that is in the stormy Channel as soon as it leaves the shelter of the pier at Dover, not like that of one that glides down the Thames for miles.

After great moments and high triumphs in life comes Marah.

Marah was just before Elim—the alternation, how blessed! The shade of palms and cool water of the wells, one for each tribe and one for each 'elder.' So we have alternations in life and experience.

II. The wrong and the right ways of taking the bitter experience. The people grumbled: Moses cried to the Lord. The quick forgetfulness of deliverances. The true use of speech is not complaint, but prayer.

III. The power that changes bitter to sweet. The manner of the miracle is singular. God hides Himself behind Moses, and His miraculous power behind the material agent. Perhaps the manner of the miracle was intended to suggest a parallel with the first plague. There the rod made the Nile water undrinkable. There is a characteristic economy in the miraculous, and outward things are used, as Christ used the pool and the saliva and the touch, to help the weak faith of the deaf and dumb man.

What changes bitter to sweet for us?—the Cross, the remembrance of Christ's death. 'Consider Him that endured.' The Cross is the true tree which, when 'cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet.'

Recognition of and yielding to God's will: that is the one thing which for us changes all. The one secret of peace and of getting sweetness out of bitterness is loving acceptance of the will of God.

Discernment of purpose in God's 'bitter' dealings—'for our profit.' The dry rod 'budded.' The Prophet's roll was first bitter, then sweet. Affliction 'afterwards yieldeth the peaceable fruit.'

THE BREAD OF GOD

'Then said the Lord unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in My law, or no. 5. And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily. 6. And Moses and Aaron said unto all the children of Israel, At even, then ye shall know that the Lord hath brought you out from the land of Egypt: 7. And in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the Lord; for that He heareth your murmurings against the Lord: and what are we, that ye murmur against us? 8. And Moses said, This shall be, when the Lord shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; for that the Lord heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against Him: and what are we? your murmurings are not against us, but against the Lord. 9. And Moses spake unto Aaron, Say unto all the congregation of the children of

Israel, Come near before the Lord: for He hath heard your murmurings. 10. And it came to pass, as Aaron spake unto the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and, behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. 11. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 12. I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel: speak unto them, saying, At even ye shall eat flesh, and in the morning ye shall be filled with bread; and ye shall know that I am the Lord your God.'—EXODUS xvi. 4-12.

UNBELIEF has a short memory. The Red Sea is forgotten in a month. The Israelites could strike their timbrels and sing their lyric of praise, but they could not believe that to-day's hunger could be satisfied. Discontent has a slippery memory. They wish to get back to the flesh-pots, of which the savour is in their nostrils, and they have forgotten the bitter sauce of affliction. When they were in Egypt, they shrieked about their oppression, and were ready to give up anything for liberty; when they have got it, they are ready to put their necks in the yoke again, if only they can have their stomachs filled. Men do not know how happy they are till they cease to be so. Our present miseries and our past blessings are the themes on which unbelief harps. Let him that is without similar sin cast the first stone at these grumbling Israelites. Without following closely the text of the narrative, we may throw together the lessons of the manna.

I. Observe God's purpose in the gift, as distinctly expressed in the promise of it.

'That I may prove them, whether they will walk in My law or no.' How did the manna become a test of this? By means of the law prescribed for gathering it. There was to be a given quantity daily, and twice as much on the sixth day. If a man trusted God for to-morrow, he would be content to stop collecting when he had filled his omer, tempting as the easily gathered abundance would be. Greed and unbelief would masquerade then as now, under the guise of prudent foresight. The old Egyptian parallels to 'make hay while the sun shines,' and suchlike wise sayings of the philosophy of distrust, would be solemnly spoken, and listened to as pearls of wisdom. When experience had taught that, however much a man gathered, he had no more than his omer full, after all,—and is not that true yet?—then the next temptation would be to practise economy, and have something over for to-morrow. Only he who absolutely trusted God to provide for him would eat up his portion, and lie down at night with a quiet heart, knowing that He who had fed him would feed. When experience had taught that what was saved rotted, then laziness would come in and say, 'What is the use of gathering twice as much on the sixth day? Don't we know that it will not keep?' So the whole of the gift was a continual training of, and therefore a continual test for, faith. God willed to let His gifts come in this hand-to-mouth fashion, though He could have provided at once what would have obviously lasted them all their wilderness life, in order that they might be habituated to cling to Him, and that their daily bread might be doubly for their nourishment, feeding their bodies and strengthening that faith which, to them as to us, is the condition of all blessedness. God lets our blessings, too, trickle to us drop by drop, instead of pouring them in a flood all at once upon us, for the same reason. He does so, not because of any good to Him from our faith, except that the Infinite love loves infinitely to be loved; but for our sakes, that we may taste the peace and strength of continual dependence, and the joy of continual receiving. He could give us the principal down; but He prefers to pay us the interest, as we need it.

Christianity does not absolutely forbid laying up money or other resources for future wants. But the love of accumulating, which is so strong in many professing Christians, and the habit of amassing beyond all reasonable future wants, is surely scarcely permitted to those who profess to believe that incarnate wisdom forbade taking anxious care for the morrow, and sent its disciples to lilies and birds to learn the happy immunities of faith. We too get our daily mercies to prove us. The letter of the law for the manna is not applicable to us who gain our bread by God's blessing on our labour. But the spirit is, and the members of great commercial nations have surely little need to be reminded that still the portion put away is apt to breed worms. How often it vanishes, or, if it lasts, tortures its owner, who has more trouble keeping it than he had in getting it; or fatally corrupts his own character, or ruins his children! All God's gifts are tests, which —thanks be to Him—is the same as to say that they are means of increasing faith, and so adding to joy.

II. The manna was further a disclosure of the depth of patient long-suffering in God.

Very strikingly the 'murmurings' of the children of Israel are four times referred to in this context, and on each occasion are stated as the reason for the gift of the manna. It was God's answer to the peevish complaints of greedy appetites. When they were summoned to come near to the Lord, with the ominous warning that 'He hath heard your murmurings,' no doubt many a heart began to quake; and when the Glory flashed from the Shechinah cloud, it would burn lurid to their trembling consciences. But the message which comes from it is sweet in its gentleness, as it promises the manna because they have murmured, and in order that they may know the Lord. A mother soothes her crying infant by feeding it from her own bosom. God does not take the rod to His whimpering children, but rather tries to win them by patience, and to shame their unbelief by His swift and over-abundant answers to their complaints. When He must, He punishes; but when He can, He complies. Faith is the condition of our receiving His highest gifts; but even unbelief touches His heart with pity, and what He can give to it, He does, if it may be melted into trust. The farther men stray from Him, the more tender and penetrating His recalling voice. We multiply transgressions, He multiplies mercies.

III. The manna was a revelation in miraculous and transient form of an eternal truth.

The God who sent it sends daily bread. The words which Christ quoted in His wilderness hunger are the explanation of its meaning as a witness to this truth: 'Man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.' To a Christian, the divine power is present and operative in all natural processes as really as in those which we call miraculous. God is separable from the universe, but the universe is not separable from God. If it were separated, it would cease. So far as the reality of the divine operation is concerned, it matters not whether He works in the established fashion, through material things, or whether His will acts directly. The chain which binds a phenomenon to the divine will may be long or short; the intervening links may be many, or they may be abolished, and the divine cause and the visible effect may touch without anything between. But in either case the power is of God. Bread made out of flour grown on the other side of the world, and fashioned by the baker, and bought by the fruits of my industry, is as truly the gift of God as was the manna.

For once, He showed these men His hand at work, that we all might know that it was at work, when hidden. The lesson of the 'angel's food' eaten in the wilderness is that men are fed by the power of God's expressed and active will,—for that is the meaning of 'the word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God,'—in whatever fashion they get their food. The gift of it is from Him; its power to nourish is from Him. It is as true to-day as ever it was: 'Thou openest Thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.' The manna ceased when the people came near cornfields and settled homes. Miracles end when means are possible. But the God of the miracle is the God of the means.

Commentators make much of what is supposed to be a natural substratum for the manna, in a certain vegetable product, found in small quantities in parts of the Arabian peninsula. No doubt, we are to recognise in the plagues of Egypt, and in the dividing of the Red Sea, the extraordinary action of ordinary causes; and there is no objection in principle to doing so here. But that an exudation from the bark of a shrub, which has no nutritive properties at all, is found only in one or two places in Arabia, and that only at certain seasons and in infinitesimal quantity, seems a singularly thin 'substratum' on which to build up the feeding of two millions of people, more or less exclusively and continuously for forty years, by means of a substance which has nothing to do with tamarisk-trees, and is like the natural product in nothing but sweetness and name. Whether we admit connection between the two, or not, the miraculous character of the manna of the Israelites is unaffected. It was miraculous in its origin—'rained from heaven,' in its quantity, in its observance of times and seasons, in its putrefaction and preservation,—as rotting when kept for greed, and remaining sweet when preserved for the Sabbath. It came straight from the creative will of God, and whether its name means 'What is it?' or 'It is a gift,' the designation is equally true and appropriate, pointing, in the one case, to the mystery of its nature; in the other, to the love of the Giver, and in both referring it directly to the hand of God.

IV. The manna was typical of Christ.

Our Lord Himself has laid His hand upon it, and claimed it as a faint foreshadowing of what He is. The Jews, not satisfied with the miracle of the loaves, demand from Him a greater sign, as the condition of what they are pleased to call 'belief'—which is nothing but accepting the testimony of sense. They quote Moses as giving the manna, and imply that Messiah is expected to repeat the miracle. Christ accepts the challenge, and goes on to claim that He not only gives, but Himself is, for all men's souls, all and more than all which the manna had been to the bodies of that dead generation. Like it, He came—but in how much more profound a sense!—from heaven. Like it, He was food. But unlike it, He could still for ever the craving of the else famishing soul; unlike it, He not only nourished a bodily life already possessed, but communicated a spiritual life which never dies; and, unlike it, He was meant to be the food of the whole world. His teaching passed beyond the symbolism of the manna, when He not only declared Himself to be the 'true bread from heaven which gives life to the world,' but opened a glimpse into the solemn mystery of His atoning death by the startling and apparently repulsive paradox that 'His flesh was food indeed and His blood drink indeed.' The manna does not typically teach Christ's atonement, but it does set Him forth as the true sustenance and life-giver, sweet as honey to the soul, sent from heaven for us each, but needing to be made ours by the act of our faith. An Israelite would have starved, though the manna lay all round the camp, if he did not go forth and secure his portion; and he might no less have starved, if he did not eat what Heaven had sent. 'Crede et manducasti,' 'Believe, and thou hast eaten,'—as St. Augustine says. The personal appropriating act of faith is essential to our having Christ for the food of our souls. The bread that nourishes our bodies is assimilated to their substance, and so becomes sustenance. This bread of God, entering into our souls by faith, transforms them into its substance, and so gives and feeds an immortal life. The manna was for a generation; this bread is 'the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.' That was for a handful of men; this is for the world. Nor is the prophetic value of the manna exhausted when we recognise its witness to Christ. The food of the wilderness is the food of the city. The bread that is laid on the table, 'spread in the presence of the enemy,' is the bread that makes the feast in the king's palace. The Christ who feeds the pilgrim soldiers is the Christ on whom the conquerors banquet. 'To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna.'

JEHOVAH NISSI

'And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah Nissi [that is, the Lord is my Banner].'—EXODUS xvii. 15.

WE are all familiar with that picturesque incident of the conflict between Israel and Amalek, which ended in victory and the erection of this memorial trophy. Moses, as you remember, went up on the mount whilst Joshua and the men of war fought in the plain. But I question whether we usually attach the right meaning to the symbolism of this event. We ordinarily, I suppose, think of Moses as interceding on the mountain with God. But there is no word about prayer in the story, and the attitude of Moses is contrary to the idea that his occupation was intercession. He sat there, with the rod of God in his hand, and the rod of God was the symbol and the vehicle of divine power. When he lifted the rod Amalek fled before Israel; when the rod dropped Israel fled before Amalek. That is to say, the uplifted hand was not the hand of intercession, but the hand which communicated power and victory. And so, when the conflict is over, Moses builds this memorial of thanksgiving to God, and piles together these great stones—which, perhaps, still stand in some of the unexplored valleys of that weird desert land—to teach Israel the laws of conflict and the conditions of victory. These laws and conditions are implied in the name which he gave to the altar that he built—Jehovah Nissi, 'the Lord is my Banner.'

Now, then, what do these stones, with their significant name, teach us, as they taught the ancient Israelites? Let me throw these lessons into three brief exhortations.

I. First, realise for whose cause you fight.

The Banner was the symbol of the cause for which an army fought, or the cognizance of the king or commander whom it followed. So Moses, by that name given to the altar, would impress upon the minds of the cowardly mob that he had brought out of Egypt—and who now had looked into an enemy's eyes for the first time—the elevating and bracing thought that they were God's soldiers, and that the warfare which they waged was not for themselves, nor for the conquest of the country for their own sake, nor for mere outward liberty, but that they were fighting that the will of God might prevail, and that He might be the King now of one land—a mere corner of the earth—and thereby might come to be King of all the earth. That rude altar said to Israel: 'Remember, when you go into the battle, that the battle is the Lord's; and that the standard under which you war is the God for whose cause you contend—none else and none less than Jehovah Himself. You are consecrated soldiers, set apart to fight for God.'

Such is the destination of all Christians. They have a battle to fight, of which they do not think loftily enough, unless they clearly and constantly recognise that they are fighting on God's side.

I need not dwell upon the particulars of this conflict, or run into details of the way in which it is to be waged. Only let us remember that the first field upon which we have to fight for God we carry about within ourselves; and that there will be no victories for us over other enemies until we have, first of all, subdued the foes that are within. And then let us remember that the absorbing importance of inward conflict absolves no Christian man from the duty of strenuously contending for all things that are 'lovely and of good report,' and from waging war against every form of sorrow and sin which his influence can touch. There is no surer way of securing victory in the warfare within and conquering self than to throw myself into the service of others, and lose myself in their sorrows and needs. There is no possibility of my taking my share in the merciful warfare against sin and sorrow, the tyrants that oppress my fellows, unless I conquer myself. These two fields of the Christian warfare are not two in the sense of being separable from one another, but they are two in the sense of being the inside and the outside of the same fabric. The warfare is one, though the fields are two.

Let us remember, on the other hand, that whilst it is our simple bounden duty, as Christian men and women, to reckon ourselves as anointed and called for the purpose of warring against sin and sorrow, wherever we can assail them, there is nothing more dangerous, and few things more common, than the hasty identification of fighting for some whim, or prejudice, or narrow view, or partial conception of our own, with contending for the establishment of the will of God. How many wicked things have been done in this world for God's glory! How many obstinate men, who were really only forcing their own opinions down people's throats because they were theirs, have fancied themselves to be pure-minded warriors for God! How easy it has been, in all generations, to make the sign of the Cross over what had none of the spirit of the Cross in it; and to say, 'The cause is God's, and therefore I war for it'; when the reality was, 'The cause is mine, and therefore I take it for granted that it is God's.'

Let us beware of the 'wolf in sheep's clothing,' the pretence of sanctity which is only selfishness with a mask on. And, above all, let us beware of the uncharitableness and narrowness of view, the vehemence of temper, the fighting for our own hands, the enforcing of our own notions and whims and peculiarities, which have often done duty as being true Christian service for the Master's sake. We are God's host, but we are not to suppose that every notion that we take into our heads, and for which we may contend, is part of the cause of God.

And then remember what sort of men the soldiers in such an army ought to be. 'Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord.' These bearers may either be regarded as a solemn procession of priests carrying the sacrificial vessels; or, as is more probable from the context of the original, as the armour-bearers of the great King. They must be pure who bear His weapons, for these are His righteous love, His loving purity. If our camp is the camp of the Lord, no violence should be there. What sanctity, what purity, what patience, what long-suffering, what self-denial, and what enthusiastic confidence of victory there should be in those who can say, 'We are the Lord's host, Jehovah is our Banner!' He always wins who sides with God. And he only worthily takes his place in the ranks of the sacramental host of the Most High who goes into the warfare knowing that, because He is God's soldier, he will come out of it, bringing his victorious shield with him, and ready for the laurels to be twined round his undinted helmet. That is the first of the thoughts, then, that are here.

II. The second of the exhortations which come from the altar and its name is, Remember whose commands you follow.

The banner in ancient warfare, even more than in modern, moved in front of the host, and determined the movements of the army. And so, by the stones that he piled and the name which he gave them, Moses taught Israel and us that they and we are under the command of God, and that it is the movements of His staff that are to be followed. Absolute obedience is the first duty of the Christian soldier, and absolute obedience means the entire suppression of my own will, the holding of it in equilibrium until He puts His finger on the side that He desires to dip and lets the other rise. They only understand their place as Christ's servants and soldiers who have learned to hush their own will until they know their Captain's. In order to be blessed, to be strong, to be victorious, the indispensable condition is that our inmost desire shall be, 'Not my will, but Thine be done.'

Sometimes, and often, there will be perplexities in our daily lives, and conflicts very hard to unravel. We shall often be brought to a point where we cannot see which way the Banner is leading us. What then? 'It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait' for the salvation and for the guidance of his God. And we shall generally find that it is when we are looking too far ahead that we do not get guidance. You will not get guidance to-day for this day next week. When this day next week comes, it will bring its own enlightenment with it.

> 'Lead, kindly Light, . . .
> . . . One step enough for me.'

Let us take short views both of duty and of hope, and we shall not so often have to complain that we are left without knowing what the Commander's orders are. Sometimes we are so left, and that is a lesson in patience, and is generally God's way of telling us that it is not His will that we should do anything at all just yet. Sometimes we are so left in order that we may put our hand out through the darkness, and hold on by Him, and say, 'I know not what to do, but mine eyes are towards Thee.'

And be sure of this, brethren, that He will not desert His own promise, and that they who in their inmost hearts can say, 'The Lord is my Banner,' will never have to complain that He led them into a 'pathless wilderness where there was no way.' It is sometimes a very narrow track, it is often a very rough one, it is sometimes a dreadfully solitary one; but He always goes before us, and they who hold His hand will not hold it in vain. 'The Lord is my Banner'; obey His orders and do not take anybody else's; nor, above all, the suggestions of that impatient, talkative heart of yours, instead of His commandments.

III. Lastly, the third lesson that these grey stones preach to us is, Recognise by whose power you conquer.

The banner, I suppose, to us English people, suggests a false idea. It suggests the notion of a flag, or some bit of flexible drapery which fluttered and flapped in the wind; but the banner of old-world armies was a rigid pole, with some solid ornament of bright metal on the top, so as to catch the light. The banner-staff spoken of in the text links itself with the preceding incident. I said that Moses stood on the mountain-top with the rod in his hand. Now that rod was exactly a miniature banner, and when he lifted it, victory came to Israel; and when it fell, victory deserted their arms. So by the altar's name he would say, Do not suppose that it was Moses that won the battle, nor that it was the rod that Moses carried in his hand that brought you strength. The true Victor was Jehovah, and it was He who was Moses' Banner. It was by Him that the lifted rod brought victory; as for Moses, he had nothing to do with it; and the people had to look higher than the hill-top where he sat.

This thought puts stress on the first word of the phrase instead of on the last, as in my previous remarks. 'The Lord is my Banner,'—no Moses, no outward symbol, no man or thing, but only He Himself. Therefore, in all our duties, and in all our difficulties, and in all our conflicts, and for all our conquests, we are to look away from creatures, self, externals, and to look only to God. We are all too apt to trust in rods instead of in Him, in Moses instead of in Moses' Lord.

We are all too apt to trust in externals, in organisations, sacraments, services, committees, outside aids of all sorts, as our means for doing God's work, and bringing power to us and blessing to the world. Let us get away from them all, dig deeper down than any of these, be sure that these are but surface reservoirs, but that the fountain which fills them with any refreshing liquid which they may bear lies in God Himself. Why should we trouble ourselves about reservoirs when we can go to the Fountain? Why should we put such reliance on churches and services and preaching and sermons and schemes and institutions and organisations when we have the divine Lord Himself for our strength? 'Jehovah is my Banner,' and Moses' rod is only a symbol. At most it is like a lightning-conductor, but it is not the lightning. The lightning will come without the rod, if our eyes are to the heaven, for the true power that brings God down to men is that forsaking of externals and waiting upon Him which He never refuses to answer.

In like manner we are too apt to put far too much confidence in human teachers and human helpers of various kinds. And when God takes them away we say to ourselves that there is a gap that can never be filled. Ay! but the great sea can come in and fill any gap, and make the deepest and the driest of the excavations in the desert to abound in sweet water.

So let us turn away from everything external, gather in our souls and fix our hopes on Him; let us recognise the imperative duty of the Christian warfare which is laid upon us; let us docilely submit ourselves to His sweet commands, and trust in His sufficient and punctual guidance, and not expect from any outward sources that which no outward sources can ever give, but which He Himself will give—strength to our fingers to fight, and weapons for the warfare, and covering for our heads in the day of battle.

And then, when our lives are done, may the only inscription on the stone that covers us be 'Jehovah Nissi: the Lord is my banner'! The trophy that commemorates the Christian's victory should bear no name but His by whose grace we are more than conquerors. 'Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

GERSHOM AND ELIEZER

'The name of the one [of Moses' sons] was Gershom . . . and the name of the other was Eliezer. . . .'—EXODUS xviii. 3, 4.

IN old times parents often used to give expression to their hopes or their emotions in the names of their children. Very clearly that was the case in Moses' naming of his two sons, who seem to have been the whole of his family. The significance of each name is appended to it in the text. The explanation of the first is, 'For he said, I have been an alien in a strange land'; and that of the second, 'For the God of my fathers, said he, was mine help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh.' These two names give us a pathetic glimpse of the feelings with which Moses began his exile, and of the better thoughts into which these gradually cleared. The first child's name expresses his father's discontent, and suggests the bitter contrast between Sinai and Egypt; the court and the sheepfold; the gloomy, verdureless, gaunt peaks of Sinai, blazing in the fierce sunshine, and the cool, luscious vegetation of Goshen, the land for cattle. The exile felt himself all out of joint with his surroundings, and so he called the little child that came to him 'Gershom,' which, according to one explanation, means 'banishment,' and, according to another (a kind of punning etymology), means 'a stranger here'; in the other case expressing the same sense of homelessness and want of harmony with his surroundings. But as the years went on, Moses began to acclimatise himself, and to become more reconciled to his position and to see things more as they really were. So, when the second child is born, all his murmuring has been hushed, and he looks beyond circumstances, and lays his hand upon God. 'And the name of the second was Eliezer, for, he said, the God of my fathers was my help.'

Now, there are the two main streams of thought that filled these forty years; and it was worth while to put Moses into the desert for all that time, and to break off the purposes and hopes of his life sharp and short, and to condemn him to comparative idleness, or work that was all unfitted to bring out his special powers, for that huge scantling out of his life, one-third of the whole of it, in order that there might be burnt into him, not either of these two thoughts separately, but the two of them in their blessed conjunction; 'I am a stranger here'; 'God is my Help.' And so these are the thoughts which, in like juxtaposition, ought to be ours; and in higher fashion with regard to the former of them than was experienced by Moses. Let me say a word or two about each of these two things. Let us think of the strangers, and of the divine helper that is with the strangers.

I. 'A stranger here.'

Now, that is true, in the deepest sense, about all men; for the one thing that makes the difference between the man and the beast is that the beast is perfectly at home in his surroundings, and gets all that he needs out of them, and finds in them a field for all that he can do, and is fully developed to the very highest point of his capacity by what people nowadays call the 'environment' in which he is put. But the very opposite is the case in regard to us men. 'Foxes have holes,' and they are quite comfortable there; 'and the birds of the air have roosting-places,' and tuck their heads under their wings and go to sleep without a care and without a consciousness. 'But the Son of man,' the ideal Humanity as well as the realised ideal in the person of Jesus Christ, 'hath not where to lay His head.' No; because He is so 'much better than they.' Their immunity from care is not a prerogative —it is an inferiority. We are plunged into the midst of a scene of things which obviously does not match our capacities. There is a great deal more in every man than can ever find a field of expression, of work, or of satisfaction in anything beneath the stars. And no man that understands, even superficially, his own character, his own requirements, can fail to feel in his sane and quiet moments, when the rush of temptation and the illusions of this fleeting life have lost their grip upon him: 'This is not the place that can bring out all that is in me, or that can yield me all that I desire.' Our capacities transcend the present, and the experiences of the present are all unintelligible, unless the true end of every human life is not here at all, but in another region, for which these experiences are fitting us.

But, then, the temptations of life, the strong appeals of flesh and sense, the duties which in their proper place are lofty and elevating and refining, and put out of their place, are contemptible and degrading, all come in to make it hard for any of us to keep clearly before us what our consciousness tells us when it is strongly appealed to, that we are strangers and sojourners here and that this is not 'our rest, because it is polluted.' Therefore it comes to be the great glory and blessedness of the Christian Revelation that it obviously shifts the centre for us, and makes that future, and not this present, the aim for which, and in the pursuit of which, we are to live. So, Christian people, in a far higher sense than Moses, who only felt himself 'a stranger there,' because he did not like Midian as well as Egypt, have to say, 'We are strangers here'; and the very aim, in one aspect, of our Christian discipline of ourselves is that we shall keep vivid, in the face of all the temptations to forget it, this consciousness of being away from our true home.

One means of doing that is to think rather oftener than the most of us do, about our true home. You have heard, I dare say, of half-reclaimed gipsies, who for a while have been coaxed out of the free life of the woods and the moors, and have gone into settled homes. After a while there has come over them a rush of feeling, a remembrance of how blessed it used to be out in the open and away from the squalor and filth where men 'sit and hear each other groan,' and they have flung off 'as if they were fetters' the trappings of 'civilisation,' and gone back to liberty. That is what we ought to do—not going back from the higher to the lower, but smitten with what the Germans call the *heimweh*, the home-sickness, that makes us feel that we must get clearer sight of that land to which we truly belong.

Do you think about it, do you feel that where Jesus Christ is, is your home? I have no doubt that most of you have, or have had, dear ones here on earth about whom you could say that, 'Where my husband, my wife is; where my beloved is, or my children are, that is my home, wherever my abode may be.' Are you, Christian people, saying the same thing about heaven and Jesus Christ? Do you feel that you are strangers here, not only because you, reflecting upon your character and capacities and on human life, see that all these require another life for their explanation and development, but because your hearts are knit to Him, and 'where your treasure is there your heart is also'; and where your heart is there you are? We go home when we come into communion with Jesus Christ. Do you ever, in the course of the rush of your daily work, think about the calm city beyond the sea, and about its King, and that you belong to it? 'Our citizenship is in heaven,' and here we are strangers.

II. Now let me say a word about the other child's name.

'God is Helper.' We do not know what interval of time elapsed between the birth of these two children. There are some indications that the second of them was in years very much the junior. Perhaps the transition from the mood represented in the one name to that represented in the other, was a long and slow process. But be that as it may, note the connection between these two names. You can never say 'We are strangers here' without feeling a little prick of pain, unless you say too 'God is my Helper.' There is a beautiful variation of the former word which will occur to many of you, I have no doubt, in one of the old psalms: 'I am a stranger *with Thee*, and a sojourner, as were all my fathers.' There is the secret that takes away all the mourning, all the possible discomfort and pain, out of the thought: 'Here we have no continuing city,' and makes it all blessed. It does not matter whether we are in a foreign land or no, if we have that Companion with us. His presence will make blessedness in Midian, or in Thebes. It does not matter whether it is Goshen or the wilderness, if the Lord is by our side. So sweetness is breathed into the thought, and bitterness is sucked out of it, when the name of the second child is braided into the name of the first; and we can contemplate quietly all else of tragic and limiting and sad that is involved in the thought that we are sojourners and pilgrims, when we say 'Yes! we are; but the Lord is my Helper.'

Then, on the other hand, we shall never say and feel 'the Lord is my Helper,' as we ought to do, until we have got deep in our hearts, and settled in our consciousness, the other conviction that we are strangers here. It is only when we realise that there is no other permanence for us that we put out our hands and grasp at the Eternal, in order not to be swept away upon the dark waves of the rushing stream of Time. It is only when all other props are stricken from us that we rest our whole weight upon that one strong central pillar, which can never be moved. Learn that God helps, for that makes it possible to say 'I am a stranger,' and not to weep. Learn that you are strangers, for that stimulates to take God for our help. Just as when the floods are out, men are driven to the highest ground to save their lives; so when the billows of the waters of time are seen to be rolling over all creatural things, we take our flight to the Rock of Ages. Put the two together, and they fit one another and strengthen us.

This second conviction was the illuminating light upon a perplexed and problematic past. Moses, when he fled from Egypt, thought that his life's work was rent in twain. He had believed that his brethren would have seen that it was God's purpose to use him as the deliverer. For the sake of being such, he had surrendered the court and its delights. But on his young ambition and innocent enthusiasm there came this *douche* of cold water, which lasted for forty years, and sent him away into the wilderness, to be a shepherd under an Arab sheikh, with nothing to look forward to. At first he said, 'This is not what I was meant for; I am out of my element here.' But before the forty years were over he said, 'The God of my father was my help, and He delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh.' What had looked a disaster turned out to be a deliverance, a manifestation of divine help, and not a hindrance. He had got far enough away from that past to look at it sanely, that is to say gratefully. So we, when we get far enough away from our sorrows, can look back at them, sometimes even here on earth, and say, 'The mercy of the Lord compassed me about.' Here is the key that unlocks all the perplexities of providence, 'The Lord was my Helper.'

And that conviction will steady and uphold a man in a present, however dark. It was no small exercise of his faith and patience that the great lawgiver should for so many years have such unworthy work to do as he had in Midian. But even then he gathered into his heart this confidence, and brought summer about him into the mid-winter of his life, and light into the midst of darkness; 'for he said'—even then, when there was no work for him to do that seemed much to need a divine help—'the Lord is my Helper.'

And so, however dark may be our present moment, and however obscure or repulsive our own tasks, let us fall back upon that old word, 'Thou hast been my Help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.'

When Moses named his boy, his gratitude was allied with faith in favours to come; and when he said 'was,' he meant also 'will be.' And he was right. He dreamt very little of what was coming, but this confidence that was expressed in his second child's name was warranted by that great future that lay before him, though he did not know it. When the pinch came his confidence faltered. It was easy to say 'The Lord is my Helper,' when there was nothing very special for which God's help was needed, and nothing harder to do than to look after a few sheep in the wilderness. But when God said to him, 'Go and stand before Pharaoh,' Moses for the moment forgot all about God's being his helper, and was full of all manner of cowardly excuses, which, like the excuses of a great many more of us for not doing our plain duty, took the shape of a very engaging modesty and diffidence as to his capacities. But God said to him, 'Surely I will be with thee.' He gave him back 'Eliezer,' in a little different form. 'You used to say that I was your helper. What has become of your faith now? Has it all evaporated when the trial comes? Surely I will be with thee.' If we will set ourselves to our tasks, not doubting God's help, we shall have occasion in the event to be sure that God did help us.

So, brethren, let us cherish these two thoughts, and never keep them apart, and God will be, as our good old hymn has it—

'Our help while troubles last,
And our eternal home.'

THE IDEAL STATESMAN[1]

'Thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them.'—EXODUS xviii. 21.

YOU will have anticipated my purpose in selecting this text. I should be doing violence to your feelings and mine if I made no reference to the event which has united the Empire and the world in one sentiment. The great tree has fallen, and the crash has for the moment silenced all the sounds of the forest. Wars abroad and controversies at home are hushed. All men, of all schools of opinion, creeds, and parties, see now, in the calm face of the dead, 'the likeness to the great of old'; and it says something, with all our faults, for the soundness of the heart of English opinion, that all sorts and conditions of men have brought their sad wreaths to lay them on that coffin.

But, whilst much has been said far more eloquently and authoritatively than I can say it, about the many aspects of that many-sided life, surely it becomes us, as Christian people, to look at it from the distinctively

---

[1] Preached on occasion of Mr. Gladstone's death.

Christian point of view, and to gather some of the lessons which, so regarded, it teaches us.

My text is part of the sagacious advice which Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, gave him about the sort of men that he should pick out to be his lieutenants in civic government. Its old-fashioned, simple phraseology may hide from some of us the elevation and comprehensiveness of the ideal that it sets forth. But it is a grand ideal; and amongst the great names of Englishmen who have guided the destinies of this land, none have approached more nearly to it than he whose death has taken away the most striking personality from our public life.

So let me ask you to look with me, first, at the ideal of a politician that is set forth here.

The free life of the desert, far away from the oppressions of surrounding military despotisms, that remarkable and antique constitution of the clan, with all its beautiful loyalty, had given this Arab sheikh a far loftier conception of what a ruler of men was than he could have found exemplified at Pharaoh's court; or than, alas! has been common in many so-called Christian countries. The field upon which he intended that these great qualities should be exercised was a very limited one, to manage the little affairs of a handful of fugitives in the desert. But the scale on which we work has nothing to do with the principles by which we work, and the laws of perspective and colouring are the same, whether you paint the minutest miniature or a gigantic fresco. So what was needed for managing the little concerns of Moses' wanderers in the wilderness is the ideal of what is needed for the men who direct the public affairs of world-wide empires.

Let me run over the details. They must be 'able men,' or, as the original has it, 'men of strength.' There is the intellectual basis, and especially the basis of firm, brave, strongly-set will which will grasp convictions, and, whatever comes, will follow them to their conclusions. The statesman is not one that puts his ear down to the ground to hear the tramp of some advancing host, and then makes up his mind to follow in their paths; he is not sensitive to the varying winds of public opinion, nor does he trim his sails to suit them, but he comes to his convictions by first-hand approach to, and meditation on, the great principles that are to guide, and then holds to them with a strength that nothing can weaken, and a courage that nothing can daunt. 'Men of strength' is what democracies like ours do most need in their leaders; a 'strong man, in a blatant land,' who knows his own mind, and is faithful to it for ever. That is a great demand.

'Such as fear God'—there is the secret of strength, not merely in reference to the intellectual powers which are not dependent for their origin, though they may be for the health and vigour of their work, upon any religious sentiment, but in regard to all true power. He that would govern others must first be lord of himself, and he only is lord of himself who is consciously and habitually the servant of God. So that whatever natural endowment we start with, it must be heightened, purified, deepened, enlarged, by the presence in our lives of a deep and vital religious conviction. That is true about all men, leaders and led, large and small. That is the bottom-heat in the greenhouse, as it were, that will make riper and sweeter all the fruits which are the natural result of natural capacities. That is the amulet and the charm which will keep a man from the temptations incident to his position and the weaknesses incident to his character. The fear of God underlies the noblest lives. That is not to-day's theory. We are familiar with the fact, and familiar with the doctrine formulated out of it, that there may be men of strong and noble lives and great leaders in many a department of human activity without any reference to the Unseen. Yes, there may be, but they are all fragments, and the complete man comes only when the fear of the Lord is guide, leader, impulse, polestar, regulator, corrector, and inspirer of all that he is and all that he does.

'Men of truth'—that, of course, glances at the crooked ways which belong not only to Eastern statesmanship, but it does more than that. He that is to lead men must himself be led by an eager haste to follow after, and to apprehend, the very truth of things. And there must be in him clear transparent willingness to render his utmost allegiance, at any sacrifice, to the dawning convictions that may grow upon him. It is only fools that do not change. Freshness of enthusiasm, and fidelity to new convictions opening upon a man, to the end of his life, are not the least important of the requirements in him who would persuade and guide individuals or a nation.

'Hating covetousness'; or, as it might be rendered, 'unjust gain.' That reference to the 'oiling of the palms' of Eastern judges may be taken in a loftier signification. If a man is to stand forth as the leader of a people, he must be clear, as old Samuel said that he was, from all suspicion of having been following out his career for any form of personal advantage. 'Clean hands,' and that not only from the vulgar filth of wealth, but from the more subtle advantages which may accrue from a lofty position, are demanded of the leader of men.

Such is the ideal. The requirements are stern and high, and they exclude the vermin that infest 'politics,' as they are called, and cause them to stink in many nostrils. The self-seeking schemer, the one-eyed partisan, the cynic who disbelieves in ideals of any sort, the charlatan who assumes virtues that he does not possess, and mouths noble sentiments that go no deeper than his teeth, are all shut out by them. The doctrine that a man may do in his public capacity things which would be disgraceful in private life, and yet retain his personal honour untarnished, is blown to atoms by this ideal. It is much to be regretted, and in some senses to be censured, that so many of our wisest, best, and most influential men stand apart from public life. Much of that is due to personal bias, much more of it is due to the pressure of more congenial duties, and not a little of it is due to the disregard of Jethro's ideal, and to the degradation of public life which has ensued thereby. But there have been great men in our history whose lives have helped to lift up the ideal of a statesman, who have made such a sketch as Jethro outlined, though they may not have used his words, their polestar; and amongst the highest of these has been the man whose loss we to-day lament.

Let me try to vindicate that expression of opinion in a word or two. I cannot hope to vie in literary grace, or in completeness, with the eulogies that have been abundantly poured out; and I should not have thought it right to divert this hour of worship from its ordinary themes, if I had had no more to say than has been far better said a thousand times in these last days. But I cannot help noticing that, though there has been a consensus of admiration of, and a practically unanimous pointing to, character as after all the secret of the spell which Mr. Gladstone has exercised for two generations, there has not been, as it seems to me, equal and due prominence given to what was, and what he himself would have said was, the real root of his character and the productive cause of his achievements.

And so I venture now to say a word or two about the religion of the man that to his own consciousness underlay all the rest of him. It is not for me to speak, and there is no need to speak, about the marvellous natural endowments and the equally marvellous, many-sided equipment of attainment which enriched the rich, natural soil. Intermeddling as he did with all knowledge, he must necessarily have been but an amateur in many of the subjects into which he rushed with such generous eagerness. But none the less is the example of all but omnivorous acquisitiveness of everything that was to be known, a protest, very needful in these days, against the possible evils of an excessive specialising which the very progress of knowledge in all departments seems to make inevitable. I do not need to speak, either, of the flow, and sometimes the torrent, of eloquence ever at his command, nor of the lithe and sinewy force of his extraordinarily nimble, as well as massive, mind; nor need I say more than one word about the remarkable combination of qualities so generally held and seen to be incompatible, which put into one personality a genius for dry arithmetical figures and a genius for enthusiasm and sympathy with all the oppressed. All these things have been said far better than I can say them, and I do not repeat them.

But I desire to hammer this one conviction into your hearts and my own, that the inmost secret of that noble life, of all that wealth of capacity, all that load of learning, which he bore lightly like a flower, was the fact that the man was, to the very depths of his nature, a devout Christian. He would have been as capable, as eloquent, and all the rest of it, if he had been an unbeliever. But he would never have been nor done what he was and did, and he would never have left the dint of an impressive and lofty personality upon a whole nation and a world, if beneath the intellect there had not been character, and beneath character Christianity.

He was far removed, in ecclesiastical connections, from us Nonconformists, and he held opinions in regard to some very important ecclesiastical questions which cut straight across some of our deepest convictions. We never had to look for much favour from his hands, because his intellectual atmosphere removed him far from sympathy with many of the truths which are dearest to the members of the Free Evangelical Churches. But none the less we recognise in him a brother in Jesus Christ, and rejoice that there, on the high places of a careless and sceptical generation, there stood a Christian man.

In this connection I cannot but, though I have no right to do so, express how profoundly thankful I, for one, was to the present Prime Minister of England that in his brief eulogium on, I was going to say, his great rival, he ended all by the emphatic declaration that Mr. Gladstone was, first and foremost, a great Christian man. Yes; and there was the secret, as I have already said, not of his merely political eminence but of the universal reverence which a nation expresses to-day. All detraction is silenced, and all calumnies have dropped away, as filth from the white wings of a swan as it soars, and with one voice the Empire and the world confess that he was a great and a good man.

I need not dwell in detail on the thoughts of how, by reason of this deep underlying fear of God, the other qualifications which are sketched in our ideal found their realisation in him; how those who, all through his career, smiled most at the successive enthusiasms which monopolised his mind, and sometimes at the contrasts between these, are now ready to admit that, whether the enthusiasms were right or wrong, there is something noble in the spectacle of a man ever keeping his mind, even when its windows were beginning to be dimmed by the frosts of age, open to the beams of new truth. And the greatest, as some people think, of his political blunders, as we are beginning, all of us, to recognise, now that party strife is hushed, was the direct consequence of that ever fresh and youthful enthusiasm for new thoughts and new lines of action. Innovators aged eighty are not too numerous.

Nor need I say more than one word about the other part of the ideal, 'hating covetousness.' The giver of peerages by the bushel died a commoner. The man that had everything at his command made no money, nor anything else, out of his long years of office, except the satisfaction of having been permitted to render what he believed to be the highest of service to the nation that he loved so well. Like our whilom neighbour, the other great commoner, John Bright, he lived among his own people; and like Samuel, of whom I have already spoken, he could stretch out his old hands and say, 'They are clean.' One scarcely feels as if, to such a life, a State funeral in Westminster Abbey was congruous. One had rather have seen him laid among the humble villagers who were his friends and companions, and in the quiet churchyard which his steps had so often traversed. But at all events the ideal was realised, and we all know what it was.

Might I say one word more? As this great figure passes out of men's sight to nobler work, be sure, on widened horizons corresponding to his tutored and exercised powers, does he leave no lessons behind for us? He leaves one very plain, homely one, and that is, 'Work while it is called to-day.' No opulence of endowment tempted this man to indolence, and no poverty of endowment will excuse us for sloth. Work is the law of our lives; and the more highly we are gifted, the more are we bound to serve.

He leaves us another lesson. Follow convictions as they open before you, and never think that you have done growing, or have reached your final stage.

He leaves another lesson. Do not suppose that the Gospel of Jesus Christ cannot satisfy the keenest intellect, nor dominate the strongest will. It has come to be a mark of narrowness and fossilhood to be a devout believer in Christ and His Cross. Some of you young men make an easy reputation for cleverness and advanced thought by the short and simple process of disbelieving what your mother taught you. Here is a man, probably as great as you are, with as keen an intellect, and he clung to the Cross of Christ, and had for his favourite hymn—

'Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.'

He leaves another lesson. If you desire to make your characters all that it is in them to be made, you must, like him, go to Jesus Christ, and get your teaching and your inspiration from that great Lord. We cannot all be great men. Never mind. It is character that tells; we can all be good men, and we can all be Christian men. And whether we build cottages or palaces, if we build on one foundation, and only if we do, they will stand.

Moses leaves another lesson, as he glides into the past. 'This man, having served his generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was gathered to his fathers, and saw corruption'; but He 'whom God hath raised up saw no corruption.' The lamps are quenched, the sun shines. Moses dies, 'The prophets, do they live for ever?' but when Moses and Elias faded from the Mount of Transfiguration 'the apostles saw no man any more, save Jesus only,' and the voice said, 'This is My beloved Son; hear ye Him.'

THE DECALOGUE: I—MAN AND GOD

'And God spake all these words, saying, 2. I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 3. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. 4. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in the heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: 5. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; 6. And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. 7. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. 8. Remember the sabbath-day, to keep it holy. 9. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: 10. But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: 11. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath-day, and hallowed it.'—EXODUS xx. 1-11.

AN obscure tribe of Egyptian slaves plunges into the desert to hide from pursuit, and emerges, after forty years, with a code gathered into 'ten words,' so brief, so complete, so intertwining morality and religion, so free from local or national peculiarities, so close fitting to fundamental duties, that it is to-day, after more than three thousand years, authoritative in the most enlightened peoples. The voice that spoke from Sinai reverberates in all lands. The Old World had other lawgivers who professed to formulate their precepts by divine inspiration: they are all fallen silent. But this voice, like the trumpet on that day, waxes louder and louder as the years roll. Whose voice was it? The only answer explaining the supreme purity of the commandments, and their immortal freshness, is found in the first sentence of this paragraph, 'God spake all these words.'

I. We have first the revelation, which precedes and lays the foundation for the commandments; 'I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt.' God speaks to the nation as a whole, establishing a special relation between Himself and them, which is founded on His redeeming act, and is reciprocal, requiring that they should be His people, as He is their God. The manifestation in act of His power and of His love precedes the claim for reverence and obedience. This is a universal truth. God gives before He asks us to give. He is not a hard taskmaster, 'gathering where He has not strawn.' Even in that system which is eminently 'the law,' the foundation is a divine act of deliverance, and only when He has won the people for Himself by redeeming them from bondage does He call on them for obedience. His rule is built on benefits. He urges no mere right of the mightier, nor cares for service which is not the glad answer of gratitude. The flashing flames which ran as swift heralds before His descending chariot wheels, the quaking mountain. the long-drawn blasts of the trumpet, awed the gathered crowd. But the first articulate words made a tenderer appeal, and sought to found His right to command on His love, and their duty to obey on their gratitude. The great gospel principle, that the Redeemer is the lawgiver, and the redeemed are joyful subjects because their hearts are touched with love, underlies the apparently sterner system of the Old Testament. God opens His heart first, and then asks for men's.

This prelude certainly confines the Decalogue to the people of Israel. Their deliverance is the ground on which the law is rested, therefore, plainly, the obligation can be no wider than the benefit. But though we are not bound to obey any of the Ten Commandments, because they were given to Israel, they are all, with one exception, demonstrably, a transcript of laws written on the heart of mankind; and this fact carries with it a strong presumption that the law of the Sabbath, which is the exception referred to, should be regarded as not an exception, but as a statute of the primeval law, witnessed to by conscience, republished in wondrous precision and completeness in these venerable precepts. The Ten Commandments are binding on us; but they are not binding as part, though the fundamental part, of the Jewish law.

Two general observations may be made. One is on the negative character of the commandments as a whole. Law prohibits because men are sinful. But prohibitions pre-suppose as their foundation positive commands. We are forbidden to do something because we are inclined to do it, and because we ought to do the opposite. Every 'thou shalt not' implies a deeper 'thou shalt.' The cold negation really rests on the converse affirmative command.

The second remark on the law as a whole is as to the relation which it establishes between religion and morality, making the latter a part of the former, but regarding it as secured only by the prior discharge of the obligations of the former. Morality is the garb of religion; religion is the animating principle of morality. The attempts to build up a theory of ethics without reference to our relations to God, or to secure the practice of righteousness without such reference, or to substitute, with a late champion of unbelief, 'the service of man' for the worship of God, are all condemned by the deeper and simpler wisdom of this law. Christians should learn the lesson, which the most Jewish of the New Testament writers had drawn from it, that 'pure and undefiled service' of God is the service of man, and should beware of putting asunder what God has joined so closely.

II. The first commandment bears in its negative form marks of the condition of the world when it was spoken, and of the strong temptation to polytheism which the Israelites were to resist. Everywhere but in that corner among the wild rocks of Sinai, men believed in 'gods many.' Egypt swarmed with them; and, no doubt, the purity of Abraham's faith had been sadly tarnished in his sons. We cannot understand the strange fascination of polytheism. It is a disease of humanity in an earlier stage than ours. But how strong it was and is, all history shows. All these many gods were on amicable terms with one another, and ready to welcome newcomers. But the monotheism, which was here laid at the very foundation of Israel's national life, parted it by a deep gulf from all the world, and determined its history.

The prohibition has little force for us; but the posi tive command which underlies it is of eternal force. We should rather think of it as a revelation and an invitation than as a mere command. For what is it but the declaration that at the centre of things is throned, not a rabble of godlings, nor a stony impersonal somewhat, nor a hypothetical unknowable entity, nor a shadowy abstraction, but a living Person, who can say 'Me,' and whom we can call on as 'Thou,' and be sure that He hears? No accumulation of finite excellences, however fair, can satisfy the imagination, which feels after one Being, the personal ideal of all perfectness. The understanding needs one ultimate Cause on which it can rest amid the dance of fleeting phenomena; the heart cannot pour out its love to be shared among many. No string of goodly pearls will ever give the merchantman assurance that his quest is complete. Only when human nature finds all in One, and that One a living Person, the Lover and Friend of all souls, does it fold its wings and rest as a bird after long flight.

The first commandment enjoins, or rather blesses us by showing us that we may cherish, supreme affection, worship, trust, self-surrender, aspiration, towards one God. After all, our God is that which we think most precious, for which we are ready to make the greatest sacrifices, which draws our warmest love; which, lost, would leave us desolate; which, possessed, makes us blessed. If we search our hearts with this 'candle of the Lord,' we shall find many an idol set up in their dark corners, and be startled to discover how much we need to bring ourselves to be judged and condemned by this commandment It is the foundation of all human duty. Obedience to it is the condition of peace and blessedness, light and leading for mind, heart, will.

affections, desires, hopes, fears, and all the world within, that longs for one living Person even when it least knows the meaning of its longings and the reason of its unrest.

III. The second commandment forbids all representations, whether of the one God or of false deities. The golden calf, which was a symbol of Jehovah, is condemned equally with the fair forms that haunted the Greek Olympus, or the half-bestial shapes of Egyptian mythology. The reasons for the prohibition may be considered as two,—the impossibility of setting forth the glory of the Infinite Spirit in any form, and the certainty that the attempt will sink the worshipper deeper in the mire of sense. An image degrades God and damages men. By it religion reverses its nature, and becomes another clog to keep the soul among the things seen, and an ally of all fleshly inclinations. We know how idolatry seemed to cast a spell over the Israelites from Egypt to Babylon, and how their first relapse into it took place almost before the voice which 'spake all these words' had ceased.

In its grosser form, we have no temptation to it. But there are other ways of breaking the commandment than setting up an image. All sensuous worship in which the treacherous aid of art is called in to elevate the soul, comes perilously near to contradicting its spirit, if not its letter. The attempt to make of the senses a ladder for the soul to climb to God by, is a great deal more likely to end in the soul's going down the ladder than up it. The history of public worship in the Christian Church teaches that the less it has to do with such slippery help the better. There is a strong current running in England, at all events, in the direction of bringing in a more artistic, or, as it is called, a 'less bare,' form of service. We need to remember that the God who is a Spirit is worshipped 'in spirit,' and that outward forms may easily choke, and outward aids hinder, that worship.

The especial difficulty of obedience to this commandment is marked by the reason or sanction annexed. That opens a wide field, on which it would be folly to venture here. There is a glimpse of God's character, and a statement of a law of His working. He is a 'jealous' God. We need not be afraid of the word. It means nothing but what is congruous with the loftiest conception of a loving God. It means that He allows of no rival in our hearts' affection, or in our submission for love's sake to Him. A half trust in God is no trust. How can worship be shared, or love be parted out, among a pantheon? Our poor hearts ask of one another and get from one another, wherever a man and a woman truly love, just what God asks,—'All in all, or not at all.' His jealousy is but infinite love seeking to be known as such, and asking for a whole heart.

The law of His providence sounds hard, but it is nothing more than stating in plain words the course of the world's history, which cannot be otherwise if there is to be any bond of human society at all. We hear a great deal in modern language about solidarity (and sometimes it is spelled with a final 'e,' to look more philosophical) and heredity. The teaching of this commandment is simply a statement of the same facts, with the addition that the Lawgiver is visible behind the law. The consequences of conduct do not die with the doers. 'The evil that men do, lives after them.' The generations are so knit together, and the full results of deeds are often so slow-growing, that one generation sows and another reaps. Who sowed the seed that fruited in misery, and was gathered in a bitter harvest of horrors and crimes in the French Revolution? Who planted the tree under which the citizens of the United States sit? Did not the seedling go over in the *Mayflower?* As long as the generations of men are more closely connected than those of sheep or birds, this solemn word must be true. Let us see that we sow no tares to poison our children when we are in our graves. The saying had immediate application to the consequences of idolatry in the history of Israel, and was a forecast of their future. But it is true evermore and everywhere.

IV. The third commandment must be so understood as to bring it into line with the two preceding, as of equal breadth and equally fundamental. It cannot, therefore, be confined to the use of the name of God in oaths, whether false or trivial. No doubt, perjury and profane swearing are included in the sweep of the prohibition; but it reaches far beyond them. The name of God is the declaration of His being and character. We take His name 'in vain' when we speak of Him unworthily. Many a glib and formal prayer, many a mechanical or self-glorifying sermon, many an erudite controversy, comes under the lash of this prohibition. Professions of devotion far more fervid than real, confessions in which the conscience is not stricken, orthodox teachings with no throb of life in them, unconscious hypocrisies of worship, and much besides, are gibbeted here. The most vain of all words are those which have become traditional stock in trade for religious people, which once expressed deep convictions, and are now a world too wide for the shrunk faith which wears them.

The positive side underlying the negative is the requirement that our speech of God shall fit our thought of God, and our thought of Him shall fit His Name; that our words shall mirror our affections, and our affection be a true reflection of His beauty and sweetness; that cleansed lips shall reverently utter the Name above every name, which, after all speech, must remain unspoken; and that we shall feel it to be not the least wonderful or merciful of His condescensions that He 'is extolled with our tongues.'

V. The series of commandments referring to Israel's relations with God is distinctly progressive from the first to the fourth, which deals with the Sabbath. The fact that it appears here, side by side with these absolutely universal and first principles of religion and worship, clearly shows that the giver of the code regarded it as of equal comprehensiveness. If we believe that the giver of the code was God, we seem shut up to the conclusion that, though the Sabbath is a positive institution, and in so far unlike the preceding commandments, it is to be taken as not merely a temporary or Jewish ordinance. The ground on which it is rested here points to the same conclusion. The version of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy bases it on the Egyptian deliverance, but this, on the divine rest after creation. As we have already said, we do not regard the Decalogue as binding on us because given to Israel; but we do regard it as containing laws universally binding, which are written by God's finger, not on tables of stone, but on 'the fleshly tables of the heart.' All the others are admittedly of this nature. Is not the Sabbath law likewise? It is not, indeed, inscribed on the conscience, but is the need for it not stamped on the physical nature? The human organism requires the seventh-day rest, whether men toil with hand or brain. Historically, it is not true that the Sabbath was founded by this legislation. The traces of its observance in Genesis are few and doubtful; but we know from the inscriptions that the seventh, fourteenth, twenty-first, and twenty-eighth days of the moon were set apart by the Assyrians, and scholars can supply other instances. The 'Remember' of this commandment can scarcely be urged as establishing this, for it may quite as naturally be explained to mean 'Remember, as each successive seventh day comes round, to consecrate it.' But apart from that, the law written on body, mind, and soul says plainly to all men, 'Rest on the seventh day.' Body and mind need repose; the soul needs quiet communion with God. No vigorous physical, intellectual, or religious life will long be kept up, if that need be disregarded. The week was meant to be given to work, which is blessed and right if done after the pattern of God's. The Sabbath was meant to lift to a share in His rest, to bring eternity into time, to renew wasted strength 'by a wise passiveness,' and to draw hearts dissipated by contact with fleeting tasks back into the stillness where they can find themselves in fellowship with God.

We have not the Jewish Sabbath, nor is it binding on us. But as men we ought to rest, and resting, to worship, on one day in the week. The unwritten law of Christianity, moulding all outward forms by its own free spirit, gradually, and without premeditation, slid from the seventh to the first day, as it had clear right to do. It was the day of Christ's resurrection, probably of His ascension, and of Pentecost. It is 'the Lord's Day.' In observing it, we unite both the reasons for the Sabbath given in Exodus and Deuteronomy,—the completion of a higher creation in the resurrection rest of the Son of God, and the deliverance from a sorer bondage by a better Moses. The Christian Sunday and its religious observance are indispensable to the religious life of individuals and nations. The day of rest is indispensable to their well-being. Our hard-working millions will bitterly rue their folly, if they are tempted to cast it away on the plea of obtaining opportunities for intellectual culture and enjoyment. It is

'The couch of time, care's balm and bay,'

and we shall be wise if we hold fast by it; not because the Jews were bid to hallow the seventh day, but because we need it for repose, and we need it for religion.

THE DECALOGUE: II.—MAN AND MAN

'Honour thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. 13. Thou shalt not kill. 14. Thou shalt not commit adultery. 15. Thou shalt not steal. 16. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. 17. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's. 18. And all the people saw the thunderings and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and, when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. 19. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die. 20. And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that His fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not. 21. And the people stood afar off: and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was.'—EXODUS xx. 12-21.

I. THE broad distinction between the two halves of the Decalogue is that the former deals with man's relations to God, and the latter with His relations to men. This double division is recognised in the New Testament summary of 'all the law,' as found in two commandments, and is probably implied in the two tables on which it was inscribed. Commentators have been much exercised, however, about how to divide the commandments between these two parts. The fifth which is the first in this division, belongs in substance to the second half, but its form connects it with the first table. It is like the preceding ones in having a reason appended, and in naming 'the Lord thy God'; while the following are all bare, curt prohibitions. The fact seems to be that it is a transition commandment, and meant to cast special sacredness round the parental relationship, by paralleling it, in some sense, with that to God, of which it is a reflection. Other duties to other men stand on a different level from duties to parents. 'Honour,' which is to be theirs, is not remote from the reverence due to God. They are, as it were, His shadows to the child. The fatherhood of God is dimly revealed in that parting off the commandment from the second table, and assimilating it in form to the laws of the first.

II. The connection of the two halves of the Decalogue teaches some important truth. Josephus said a wise thing when he remarked that, 'whereas other legislators had made religion a department of virtue, Moses made virtue a department of religion.' No theory of morals is built upon the deepest foundation which does not recognise the final ground of the obligation of duty in the voice of God. Duty is *debitum*—debt. Who is the creditor? Myself? An impersonal law? Society? No, God. The practice of morality depends, like its theory, on religion. In the long-run, and on the wide scale, nations and periods which have lost the latter will not long keep the former in any vigour or purity. He who begins by erasing the first commandment will sooner or later make a clean sweep of all the ten. And, on the other hand, wherever there is true worship of the one God, there all fair charities between man and man will flourish and fruit. The two tables are one law. Duties to God come first, and those to man, who is made in the image of God, flow from these.

III. The order of these human duties is significant. We have, next after the law of parental reverence, three commandments, which, in a descending series of importance, forbid crimes against life, marriage, and property. Then the law passes from deeds to the more subtle, and, as men think, less grave, offences of the tongue. Next it crosses the boundary which divides human from divine law, and crimes from sins, to take cognisance of unspoken and unacted desires. So the order of progress in the first table is exactly the reverse of that in the second. There we begin with inward devotion, and travel outwards by deed and word to the sabbatical institution; here we begin with overt acts, and travel inwards, through words, to the hidden desire. The end touches the beginning. For that which we 'covet' is our God; and the first commandment is only obeyed when our hearts hunger after Him, and not after earth. The sequence here corresponds to the order of progress in our knowledge and practice of our human duties. The first thing that the rudest state of society has to do is to establish some kind of security for life and property and woman's honour. The worst men know that much as their duty, however foul may be their lips, and hot their passions. Then the recognition of the sanctity of the great gift of speech, and the supreme obligations of veracity, grow upon men as they get above the earlier stage. Most children pass through a phase when they tell lies as pastime, and most rude societies and half-moralised men have a similar epoch. Last of all, when actions have been bridled and the tongue taught the law of truth, comes the full recognition that the work is not done till the silent longing of a hungry heart is stilled, and that unselfish love of our neighbour is only perfect when we can rejoice in his good and wish none of it for ourselves. The second table is a chart of moral progress.

IV. The scope of these laws has often been violently stretched so as to include all human duty; but without tugging at them so as to make them cover everything, we may note briefly how far they extend. We are scarcely warranted in taking any of them but the last, as going deeper than overt acts, for, though our Lord has taught in the Sermon on the Mount that hatred is murder, and impure desire adultery, that is His deepening of the commandment. But it is quite fair to bring out the positive precept which, in each case, underlies the stern, short prohibition.

The fifth commandment shares with the fourth the distinction of being a positive command. It enjoins 'honour,' not 'love,' partly because, in olden times, the father was a prince in his house in a sense that has long since ceased to be true, partly because there was less need to enjoin the affection which is in some degree instinctive, than the submission and respect which the children are tempted to withhold, partly in order to suggest the analogy with reverence to God. A strange change has passed over the relations of parents and children, even within a generation. There is more, perhaps, of frank familiar intercourse, which, no doubt, is an improvement on the old style. But there is a great deal less of what the commandment enjoins. City life, education, the general impairing of the idea of authority, which we see everywhere, have told upon many families; and many a father who, by indulgence or by too much engrossment in business, lets the children twitch the reins out of his hands, might lament, as his grown-up children spurn control, 'If then I be a father, where is mine honour?' There is no one of the commandments which it is more needful to preach in England than this.

The promise attached to it has another side of threatening. It is a plain fact that when the paternal relation is corrupted, a powerful solvent has been introduced which rapidly tends to disintegrate society. The most ancient empire in the world to-day, China, has, amid many vices and follies, been preserved mainly by the profound reverence to ancestors which is largely its real working religion. The most vigorous power in the old world, Rome, owed its iron might not only to its early simplicity of life and its iron tenacity, but to the strength of paternal authority and the willingness of filial obedience. No more serious damage can be inflicted on society or on individuals than the weakening of the honour paid to fathers and mothers.

'Thou shalt not kill' forbids not only the act of murder, but all that endangers life. It enjoins all care, diligence, and effort to preserve it. A man who looks on while another drowns, or who sends a ship out half manned and overloaded, breaks it as really as a red-handed murderer. But the commandment was not intended to touch the questions of capital punishment or of war. These were allowed under the Jewish code, and cannot therefore be supposed to be prohibited here. How far either is consistent with the deepest meaning of the law, as expanded and reconsecrated in Christianity, is another question. Their defenders have to execute some startling feats of gymnastics to harmonise either with the New Testament.

'Curus kind o' Christian dooty,
This 'ere cuttin' folks's throats.'

The ground of the commandment is not given, seeing that conscience is expected to admit its force as soon as stated. But its place at the head of the second table brings it into connection with the first commandment, and suggests that man's life is sacred because he is the image of God. As Christians, we are bound to interpret it on the lines which Christ has laid down; according to which, hatred is murder, and love is the fulfilling of this as of all other laws. So Luther's comprehensive summing up of the duties enjoined may be accepted: 'Patience, gentleness, kindliness, peaceableness, pity, and, of all things, a sweet, friendly heart, without any hate, anger, bitterness, toward any, even enemies.'

In like manner, the seventh commandment sanctifies wedded life, and is the first step in that true reverence of woman which marked the Jewish people through all their history, and was in such contrast to her position in all other ancient societies. Purity in all the relations of the sexes, the control of passion, the reverence for marriage, are subjects difficult to speak of in public. But modern society sorely needs some plain speaking on these subjects—abundance of bread and idleness, facilities for divorce, the filth which newspapers lay down on every breakfast-table, the insidious sensuality of much fiction and art, the licence of the stage. The opportunities for secret profligacy in great cities conspire to loosen the bonds of morality. I would venture to ask public teachers seriously to consider their duty in this matter, and to seek for opportunities wisely to warn budding youth of the pitfalls in its path.

What is 'stealing'? As Luther says, 'It is the smallest part of the thieves that are hung. If we are to hang them all, where shall we get rope enough? We must make all our belts and straps into halters'

Theft is the taking or keeping what is not 'mine.' But what do we mean by 'mine'? Communists tell us that 'property is theft.' But that is the exaggeration of the scriptural teaching that all property is trust property, that possessions are 'mine' on conditions and for purposes, that I cannot 'do what I will with mine own,' but am a steward, set to dispense it to those who want. The Christian doctrine of stewardship extends this commandment over much ground which we seldom think of as affected by it. All sharp practice in business, the shopkeeper's false weights and the merchant's equivalents of these, adulterations, pirating trademarks, imitating a rival's goods, infringing patents, and the like, however disguised by fine names, are neither more nor less than stealing. Many a prosperous gentleman says solemnly every Sunday of his life, 'Incline our hearts to keep this law,' who would have to live in a much more modest fashion if his prayer were, by any unfortunate accident, answered.

False witness is not only given in court. The sins of the tongue against the law of love are more subtle and common than those of act. 'Come, let us enjoy ourselves, and abuse our neighbours,' is the real meaning of many an invitation to social intercourse. If some fairy could treat our newspapers as the Russian censors do, and erase all the lies about the opposite side, which they report and coin, how many blank columns there would be! If all the words of ill-natured calumny, of uncharitable construction of their friends which people speak, could be made inaudible, what stretches of silence would open out in much animated talk! A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow.'

But deed and word will not be right unless the heart be right; and the heart will be wrong unless it be purged of the bitter black drop of covetousness. The desire to make my neighbour's goods mine is the parent of all breaches of neighbourly duty, even as its converse 'love' is the fulfilling of it all; for such desire implies that I am ruled by selfishness, and that I would willingly deprive another of goods, for my own gratification. Such a temper, like a wild boar among vineyards, will trample down all the rich clusters in order to slake its own thirst. Find a man who yields to his desires after his neighbour's goods, and you find a man who will break all commandments like a hornet in a spider's web. Be he a Napoleon, and glorified as a conqueror and hero, or be he some poor thief in a jail, he has let his covetousness get the upper hand, and so all wrong-doing is possible. Nor is it only the second table which covetousness dashes to fragments. It serves the first in the same fashion; for, as St. Paul puts it, the covetous man 'is an idolater,' and is as incapable of loving God as of loving his neighbour. This final commandment, overleaping the boundary between conduct and character, and carrying the light of duty into the dark places of the heart, where deeds are fashioned, sets the whole flock of bats and twilight-loving creatures in agitation. It does what is the main work of the law, in compelling us to search our hearts, and in convincing of sin. It is the converse of the thought that all the law is contained in love; for it closes the list of sins with one which begets them all, and points us away from actions and words which are its children to selfish desire as in itself the transgression of all the law, whether it be that which prescribes our relations to God or that which enjoins our duties to man.

THE FEAST OF INGATHERING IN THE END OF THE YEAR

And the feast of harvest, the first-fruits of thy labours, which thou hast sown in thy field: and the feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when thou hast gathered in thy labours out of the field.'—EXODUS xxiii. 16.

THE Israelites seem to have had a double beginning of the year—one in spring, one at the close of harvest; or it may only be that here the year is regarded from the natural point of view—a farmer's year. This feast was at the gathering in of the fruits, which was the natural close of the agricultural year.

This festival of ingathering was the Feast of Tabernacles. It is remarkable that the three great sacred festivals, the Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles, had all a reference to agriculture, though two of them also received a reference to national deliverances. This fact may show that they were in existence before Moses, and that he simply imposed a new meaning on them.

Be that as it may, I take these words now simply as a starting-point for some thoughts naturally suggested by the period at which we stand. We have come to the end of another year—looked for so long, passed so swiftly, and now seeming to have so utterly departed!

I desire to recall to you and to myself the solemn real sense in which for us too the end of the year is a 'time of ingathering' and 'harvest.' We too begin the new year with the accumulated consequences of these past days in our 'barns and garners.'

Now, in dealing with this thought, let me put it in two or three forms.

I. Think of the past as still living in and shaping the present.

It is a mere illusion of sense that the past is gone utterly. 'Thou carriest them away, as with a flood.' We speak of it as irrevocable, unalterable, that dreadful past. It is solemnly true that 'ye shall no more return that way.'

But there is a deeper truth in the converse thought that the apparently transient is permanent, that nothing human ever dies, that the past is present. 'The grass withereth, the flower fadeth,'—yes, but only its petals drop, and as they fall, the fruit which they sheltered swells and matures.

The thought of the present as the harvest from the past brings out in vivid and picturesque form two solemn truths.

The first is the passing away of all the external, but of it only. It has all gone where the winter's cold, the spring rains, the summer's heats have gone. But just as these live in the fruitful results that have accrued from them, just as the glowing sunshine of the departed ardent summer is in the yellow, bending wheat-ear or glows in the cluster, so, in a very solemn sense, 'that which hath been is now' in regard to every life. The great law of continuity makes the present the inheritor of the past. That law operates in national life, in which national characteristics are largely precipitates, so to speak, from national history. But it works even more energetically, and with yet graver consequences, in our individual lives. 'The child is father of the man.' What we are depends largely on what we have been, and what we have been powerfully acts in determining what we shall be. Life is a mystic chain, not a heap of unconnected links.

And there is another very solemn way in which the past lives on in each of us. For not only is our present self the direct descendant of our past selves, but tha past still subsists in that we are responsible for it, and shall one day have to answer for it. The writer of Ecclesiastes followed the statement just now quoted as to the survival of the past, with another, which is impressive in its very vagueness: 'God seeketh again that which is passed away.'

So the undying past lives in its results in ourselves, and in our being answerable for it to God.

This metaphor is insufficient in one respect. There is not one epoch for sowing and another for reaping, but the two processes are simultaneous, and every moment is at once a harvest and a seed-time.

This fact masks the reality of the reaping here, but it points on to the great harvest when God shall say, 'Gather the wheat into My barns!'

II. Notice some specific forms of this reaping and ingathering.

(1) Memory.

It is quite possible that in the future it may embrace all the life.

'Chambers of imagery.'

(2) Habits and character. Like the deposit of a flood. 'Habitus' means clothing, and cloth is woven from single threads.

(3) Outward consequences, position, reputation, etc.

III. Make a personal reference to ourselves.

What sort of harvest are we carrying over from this year? Lay this to heart as certain, that we enter on no new year—or new day—empty-handed, but always 'bearing our sheaves with us.' 'Be not deceived! God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.'

But remember, that while this law remains, there is also the law of forgiveness, 'Go in peace!' and there may be a new beginning, 'Sin no more!'

'THE LOVE OF THINE ESPOUSALS'

'And He said unto Moses, Come up unto the Lord, thou, and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship ye afar off. 2. And Moses alone shall come near the Lord; but they shall not come nigh, neither shall the people go up with him. 3. And Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the Lord hath said will we do. 4. And Moses wrote all the words of the Lord, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. 5. And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt-offerings, and sacrificed peace-offerings of oxen unto the Lord. 6. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basons; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. 7. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient. 8. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words. 9. Then went up Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; 10. And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under His feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire-stone, and as it were the body of heaven in His clearness. 11. And upon the nobles of the children of Israel He laid not His hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink. 12. And the Lord said unto Moses, Come up to Me into the mount, and be there: and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them.'—EXODUS xxiv. 1-12.

AN effort is needed to feel what a tremendous and unique fact is narrated in these words. Next to the incarnation, it is the most wonderful and far-reaching moment in history. It is the birthday of a nation, which is God's son. It is the foundation stone of all subsequent revelation. Its issues oppress that ancient people to-day, and its promises are not yet exhausted. It is history, not legend, nor the product of later national vanity. Whatever may come of analysing 'sources' and of discovering 'redactors,' Israel held a relation to God all its own; and that relation was constituted thus.

I. Note the preliminaries of the covenant. The chapter begins with the command to Moses to come up to the mount, with Aaron and other representatives of the people. But he was already there when the command was given, and a difficulty has been found (or, shall we say, made) out of this. The explanation seems reasonable and plain enough, that the long section extending from Exodus xx. 22, and containing the fundamental laws as spoken by God, is closed by our verses 1 and 2, which imply, in the very order to Moses to come up with his companions, that he must first go down to bring them. God dismisses him as a king might end an audience with his minister, by bidding him return with attendants. The singular use of the third person in reference to Moses in the third verse is not explained by supposing another writer; for, whoever wrote it, it would be equally anomalous.

So he comes down from the stern cloud-encircled peak to that great plain where the encampment lay, and all eyes watch his descent. The people gather round him, eager and curious. He recounts 'all the judgments,' the series of laws, which had been lodged in his mind by God, and is answered by the many-voiced shout of too swiftly promised obedience. Glance over the preceding chapters, and you will see how much was covered by 'all that the Lord hath spoken.' Remember that every lip which united in that lightly made vow drew its last breath in the wilderness, because of disobedience, and the burst of homage becomes a sad witness to human weakness and changefulness. The glory of God flashed above them on the barren granite, the awful voice had scarcely died into desert silence, nerves still tingled with excitement, and wills were bowed before Jehovah, manifestly so near. For a moment, the people were ennobled, and obedience seemed easy. They little knew what they were saying in that brief spasm of devotion. It was high-water then, but the tide soon turned, and all the ooze and ugliness, covered now, lay bare and rotting. 'Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.' We may take the lesson to ourselves, and see to it that emotion consolidates into strenuous persistency, and does not die in the very excitement of the vow.

The pledge of obedience was needed before the Covenant could be made, and, as we shall find, was reiterated in the very centre of the ceremonial ratification. For the present, it warranted Moses in preparing for the morrow's ritual. His first step was to prepare a written copy of the laws to which the people had sworn. Here we come across an old, silenced battery from which a heavy fire used to be directed against the historical accuracy of the Pentateuch. Alphabetic writing was of a later date. There could not have been a written code. The statement was a mere attempt of a later age to claim antiquity for comparatively modern legislation. It was no more historical than similar traditions in other countries, Sibylline books, etc. All that is out of court now. Perhaps some other guns will be spiked in due time, that make a great noise just at present. Then comes the erection of a rude altar, surrounded by twelve standing stones, just as on the east of Jordan we may yet see dolmens and menhirs. The altar represents the divine presence; and the encircling stones, Israel gathered around its God. The group is a memorial and a witness to the people,—and a witness against them, if disobedient. Thus two permanent records were prepared, the book and the monument. The one which seemed the more lasting has perished; the more fragile has endured, and will last to the world's end.

II. Note the rite of ratification of the covenant. The ceremonial is complex and significant. We need not stay on the mere picture, impressive and, to our eyes, strange as it is, but rather seek to bring out the meaning of these smoking offerings, and that blood flung on the altar and on the crowd. First came two sorts of sacrifices, offered not by priests, but by selected young men, probably one for each tribe, whose employment in sacrificial functions shows the priestly character of the whole nation, according to the great words of Exodus xix. 6. Burnt-offerings and peace-offerings differed mainly in the use made of the sacrifice, which was wholly consumed by fire in the former, while it was in part eaten by the offerer in the latter. The one symbolised entire consecration; the other, communion with God on the basis of sacrifice. The sin-offering does not appear here, as being of later origin, and the product of the law, which deepened the consciousness of transgression. But these sacrifices, at the threshold of the covenant, receive an expiatory character by the use made of the blood, and witness to the separation between God and man, which renders amity and covenant friendship impossible, without a sacrifice.

They must have yielded much blood. It is divided into two parts, corresponding to the two parties to the covenant, like the cloven animals in Abraham's covenant. One half is 'sprinkled' on the altar, or, as the word means, 'swung,'—which suggests a larger quantity and a more vehement action than 'sprinkling' does. That drenching of the altar with gore is either a piece of barbarism or a solemn symbol of the central fact of Christianity no less than of Judaism, and a token that the only footing on which man can be received into fellowship with God is through the offering of a pure life, instead of the sinner, which, accepted by God, covers or expiates sin. There can be no question that the idea of expiation is at the very foundation of the Old Testament ritual. It is fashionable to regard the expiatory element of Christianity as 'Hebrew old clothes,' but the fact is the other way about. It is not that Christianity has not been able to rid itself of a rude and false conception, but that 'Judaism' had its sacrifices appointed by God, in order to prepare the way for the true offering, which takes away sin.

The expiation by blood having been thus made, the hindrances to the nation's entering into covenant are removed. Therefore follows in logical order the next step, their formal (alas! how purely formal it proved to be) taking on themselves its obligations. The freshly written 'book' is produced, and read there, to the silent people, before the bloody altar, beneath the peak of Sinai. Again the chorus of assent from a thousand throats echoes among the rocks. They accept the conditions. They had done so last night; but this is the actual contract on their part, and its place in the whole order of the ceremony is significant. It follows expiation, without which man cannot enter into friendship with God, without the acceptance of which man will not yield himself in obedience. The vows which God approves are those of men whose sins are covered.

The final step was the sprinkling of the people with the blood. The division of the blood into two portions signifies that it had an office in regard to each party to the covenant. If it had been possible to pour it all on the altar, and then all on the people, that would have been done. The separation into two portions was inevitable; but in reality it is the same blood which, sprinkled on the altar, expiates, and on the worshipper, consecrates, cleanses, unites to God, and brings into covenant with Him. Hence Moses accompanies the sprinkling of the people with the explanation, 'This is the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you, upon all these conditions' (Rev. Ver. margin). It ratifies the compact on both sides. God 'hath made' it, in accepting the sprinkled blood; they have made it, in being sprinkled therewith. But while the rite sets forth the great gospel truth of expiation, the Covenant moves within the region of law. It is made 'on the basis of all these words,' and is voidable by disobedience. It is the *Magna Charta* of the nation, and its summing up is 'this do, and thou shalt live.' Its promises are mainly of outward guardianship and national blessings. And these are suspended by it, as they were in fact contingent, on the national observance of the national vow.

The general idea of a covenant is that of a compact between two parties, each of whom comes under obligations contingent on the other's discharge of his. Theologians have raised the question whether God's covenant is of this kind. Surely it is. His promises to Israel had an 'if,' and the fulfilment of the conditions necessarily secured the accomplishment of the promises. The ritual of the first covenant transcends the strictly retributive compact which it ratified, and shadows a gospel beyond law, even the new covenant which brings better gifts, and does not turn on 'do,' but simply on the sprinkling with the blood of Jesus. The words of Moses were widened to carry a blessing beyond his thoughts, which was disclosed when, in an upper chamber, a dying man said to the twelve representatives of the true Israel, 'This is the new covenant in My blood, drink ye all of it.' The blood which Moses sprinkled gave ritual cleansing, but it remained outside the man. The blood of Jesus gives true purification, and passes into our veins to become our life. The covenant by Moses was 'do and live'; that in Christ is 'believe and live.' Moses brought commandments, and on them his covenant was built; Christ brings gifts, and His covenant is all promises, which are ours on the simple condition of taking them.

III. Note the vision and feast on the basis of the covenant. The little company that climbed the mountain, venturing within the fence, represented the whole people. Aaron and his sons were the destined priests. The elders were probably seventy, because that number is the product of the two perfect numbers, and perhaps with allusion to the seventy souls who went down into Egypt with Jacob. It is emphatically said that they saw 'the God of Israel,' for that day's covenant had made him so in a new closeness of relationship. In token of that new access to and possession in Him. which was henceforth to be the prerogative of the obedient people, some manifestation of His immediate presence was poured on their astonished eyes. It is needless to inquire its nature, or to ask how such a statement is consistent with the spirituality of the divine nature, or with what this same book of Exodus says, 'There shall no man see Me, and live.' The plain intention is to assert that there was a visible manifestation of the divine presence, but no attempt is made to describe it. Our eyes are stayed at the pavement beneath His feet, which was blue as sapphire, and bright as the cloudless sky gleaming above Sinai. It is enough to learn that 'the secret of the Lord is with them' to whom He shows 'His covenant'; that, by the power of sacrifice, a true vision of God may be ours, which is 'in a mirror, darkly,' indeed, but yet is real and all sufficing. Before the covenant was made, Israel had been warned to keep afar lest He should break through on them, but now 'He laid not His hand' upon them; for only blessing can stream from His presence now, and His hand does not crush, but uphold.

Nor is this all which we learn of the intercourse with God which is possible on the ground of His covenant. They 'did eat and drink.' That may suggest that the common enjoyments of the natural life are in no way inconsistent with the vision of God; but more probably it is meant to teach a deeper lesson. We have remarked that the ritual of the peace-offering included a feast on the sacrifice 'before the Lord,' by which was signified communion with Him, as at His table, and this meal has the same meaning. They who stand in covenant relations with God, feed and feast on a sacrifice, and thereby hold fellowship with Him, since He too has accepted the sacrifice which nourishes them. So that strange banquet on Sinai taught a fact which is ever true, prophesied the deepest joys of Christian experience, which are realised in the soul that eats the flesh and drinks the blood of Christ, the Mediator of the new covenant, and dimly shadowed the yet future festival, when, cleansed and consecrated by His blood, they who have made a covenant with Him by His sacrifice, shall be gathered unto Him in the heavenly mount, where He makes a 'feast of fat things and wines on the lees well refined,' and there shall sit, for ever beholding His glory, and satisfied with the provisions of His house.

THE BREAD OF THE PRESENCE

'Thou shalt set upon the table shew-bread before Me alway.'—EXODUS xxv. 30.

I SUSPECT that to many readers the term 'shew-bread' conveys little more meaning than if the Hebrew words had been lifted over into our version. The original expression, literally rendered, is 'bread of the face'; or, as the Revised Version has it in the margin, 'presence bread,' and the meaning of that singular designation is paraphrased and explained in my text: 'Thou shalt set upon the table, bread of the presence before Me always.' It was bread, then, which was laid in the presence of God. The directions with regard to it may be very briefly stated. Every Sabbath the priests laid upon the table which stood on one side of the Altar of Incense, in the Inner Court, two piles of loaves, on each of which piles was placed a pan of incense. They lay there for a week, being replaced by fresh ones on the coming Sabbath.

The Altar of Incense in the middle symbolised the thought that the priestly life, which was the life of the nation, and is the life of the Christian both individually and collectively, is to be centrally and essentially a life of prayer. On one side of it stood the great golden lamp which, in like manner, declared that the activities of the priestly life, which was the life of Israel, and is the life of the Christian individually and collectively, is to be, in its manward aspect, a light for the world. On the other side of the Altar of Incense stood this table with its loaves. What does it say about the life of the priest, the Church, and the individual Christian? That is the question that I wish to try to answer here; and in doing so let me first ask you to look at the thing itself, and then to consider its connection with the other two articles in connection with which it made a threefold oneness.

I. Let me deal with this singular provision of the ancient ritual by itself alone.

Bread is a product at once of God's gift and of man's work. In the former aspect, He 'leaves not Himself without witness, in that,' in the yearly miracle of the harvest, 'He gives us bread from Heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness'; in the latter, considered as a product of man's activity, agriculture is, if not the first, at all events in settled communities the prime, form of human industry. The farmer and the baker begin the series of man's industries. So that these loaves were fitly taken as representatives of all kinds of human industry and their products, and as such were consecrated to God. That is the broad significance of this institution, which, as we shall have to see, links itself with the other two conceptions of the priestly life in its Godward and in its manward aspect. Now the first thing that is suggested, therefore, is the plain obligation, which is also a blessed privilege, for all men who are priests of God by faith in, and union with, the great High Priest, that they lay all their activities as an offering before God. The loaves in their very place on that table, right in front of the veil that parted the Inner Court from the inmost of all, where the Shekinah shone, and the Cherubim bowed in worship, tell us that in some sense they, too, were an offering, and that the table was an altar. Their sacrificial character is emphasised by the fact that upon the top of each of the piles there was laid a pan of incense.

So, then, the whole was an offering of Israel's activities and its results to God. And we, Christian men and women, have to make an offering of all our active life, and all its products. That thought opens up many considerations, one or two of which I ask leave to touch briefly. First, then, if my active life is to be an offering to God, that means that I am to surrender myself. And that surrender means three things: first, that in all my daily work I am to set Him before me as my end; second, that in all my daily work I am to set Him before me as my law; third, that in all my daily work I am to set Him before me as my power. As for the first, whatever a man does for any motive other, and with any end less, than God and His Glory, that act, beautiful as it may be in other respects, loses its supreme beauty, and falls short of perfect nobleness, just in the measure in which other motives, or other ends, than this supreme one, are permitted to dominate it. I do not contend for such an impossible suppression of myself as that my own blessedness and the like shall be in no manner my end, but I do maintain this, that in good old language, 'Man's chief end is to glorify God,' and that anything which I do, unless it is motived by this regard to Him as its 'chief end,' loses its noblest consecration, and is degraded from its loftiest beauty. The Altar sanctifies, and not only sanctifies but ennobles, the gift. That which has in it the taint of self-regard so pronouncedly and dominantly as that God is shut out, is like some vegetation down in low levels at the bottom of a vale, which never has the sun to shine upon it. But let it rise as some tree above the brushwood until its topmost branches are in the light, and then it is glorified. To live to self is ignoble and mean; to live for others is higher and nobler. But highest and noblest of all is to offer the loaves to God, and to make Him the end of all our activities.

Again, there is another consideration, bearing on another region in which the assertive self is only too apt to spoil all work. And that is, that if our activities are offerings to God, this means that His supreme Will is to be our law, and that we obey His commands and accept His appointments in quiet submission. The tranquillity of heart, the accumulation of power, which come to men when they, from the depths, say, 'Not my will but Thine be done'; 'Speak, Lord! for Thy servant heareth,' cannot be too highly stated. There is no such charm to make life quiet and strong as the submission of the will to God's providences, and the swift obedience of the will to God's commandments. And whilst to make self my end mars what else is beautiful, making self my law mars it even more.

Further, we offer our activities to God when we fall back upon Him as our one power, and say, 'Perfect Thy strength in my weakness.' He that goes out into the world to do his daily work, of whatsoever sort it is—you in your little sphere, or I in mine—in dependence upon himself, is sure to be defeated. He that says 'we have no strength against this great multitude that cometh against us, but our eyes are unto Thee,' will, sooner or later, be able to go back with joy, and say, 'the Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad.' The man that goes into the fight like that foolish prime minister of France under the Empire, 'with a light heart,' will very soon find his Sedan, and have shamefully to surrender. Brethren, these three things, making God the end of my work; making God's will the law of my work; making God's strength the power of my work; these are the ways by which we, too, can bring our little pile of barley bread, and lay it upon that table.

Again, this consecration of life's activities is to be carried out by treating their products, as well as themselves, as offerings to God. The loaves were the results of human activity. They were also the products of divine gifts elaborated by human effort. And both things are true about all the bread that you and I have been able to make for the satisfaction of our desires, or the sustenance of our strength—it comes ultimately from the gift of God. In regard to this consecration of the product of our activities, as well as of our activities themselves, I have but two words to offer, and the one is, let us see to it that we consecrate our enjoyment of God's gifts by bringing that enjoyment, as well as the activities which He has blessed to produce it, into His presence. That table bore the symbols of the grateful recognition of God's mercies by the people. And when our hearts are glad, and our 'bosom's lord sits lightly on his throne,' we have special need to take care that our joy be not godless, nor our enjoyment of His gifts be without reference to Himself. 'Ah,' you say, 'that is a threadbare commonplace.' Yes, it is, dear friends; it is a commonplace just because it is needful at every turn, if we are to make our lives what they ought to be.

May I say another thing? and that is, that the loaves that were laid within the Sanctuary were not intended to be separated from the others that were eaten in the tents, nor were they meant to be a kind of purchasing of an indulgence, or of a right, by surrendering a little, to the godless and selfish enjoyment of the rest of the batch, or of the rest of the harvest. Let us apply that to our money, which is one of the products of our activities; and not fancy, as a great many people do.

that what we give as a subscription to some benevolent or religious institution buys for us the right to spend all the rest selfishly. That is another commonplace, very threadbare and very feeble, when we speak it, but with claws and teeth in it that will lay hold of us, when we try to put it in practice. The enjoyments and the products of our daily activities are to be offered to God.

Still further, this table with its burden has suggestions that as Christians we are bound to bring all our work to Him for His judgment upon it. The loaves were laid right in front of the veil, behind which blazed the light of His presence. And that meant that they were laid before 'those pure eyes and perfect judgment of all-judging' God. Whether we bring our activities there or no, of course in a very real and solemn sense they are there. But what I desire to insist upon now is how important, for the nobleness and purity of our daily lives, it is that we should be in the continual habit of realising to ourselves the thought that whatever we do, we do before His Face. The Roman Catholics talk about 'the practice of the presence of God.' One does not like the phrase, but all true religion will practise what is meant by it. And for us it should be as joyous to think, 'Thou God seest me,' as it is for a child to play or work with a quiet heart, because it knows that its mother is sitting somewhere not very far off and watching that no harm comes to it. That thought of being in His presence would be for us a tonic, and a test. How it would pull us up in many a meanness, and keep our feet from wandering into many forbidden ways, if there came like a blaze of light into our hearts the thought: 'Thou God seest me!' There are many of our activities, I am afraid, which we should not like to put down on that table. Can *you* think of any in *your* lives that you would be rather ashamed to lay there, and say to Him, 'Judge Thou this'? Then do not do it. That is a brief, but a very stringent, easily applied, and satisfactory test of a great many doubtful things. If you cannot take them into the Inner Court, and lay them down there, and say, 'Look, Lord! this is my baking,' be sure that they are made, not of wholesome flour, but of poisoned grain, and that there is death in them.

Further, this table, with its homely burden of twelve poor loaves, may suggest to us how the simplest, smallest, most secular of our activities is a fit offering to Him. The loaves were not out of place amidst the sanctities of the spot, nor did they seem to be incongruous with the golden altar and the golden lampstand, and yet they were but twelve loaves. The poorest of our works is fit to be carried within the shrine, and laid upon His altar. We may be sure that He delights even in the meanest and humblest of them, if only we take them to Him and say: 'All things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee.' Ah! there are a great many strange things in Christ's treasury. Mothers will hoard up trifles that belonged to their children, which everybody else thinks worthless. Jesus Christ has in His storehouse a 'cup of cold water,' the widows' mites, and many another thing that the world counts of no value, and He recognises as precious. There is an old story about some great emperor making a progress through his dominions, where he had been receiving precious gifts from cities and nobles, and as the gay *cortège* was passing a poor cottage, the peasant-owner came out with a coarse earthenware cup filled with spring water in his hand, and offered it to his overlord as the only gift that he could give. The king accepted it, and ennobled him on the spot. Take your barley loaves to Christ, and He will lay them up in His storehouse.

II. Now I need only say a word or two about the other aspect of this table of shew-bread, taken with the other two articles in conjunction with which it formed a unity.

The lamp and the table go together. They are both offshoots from the altar in the middle. That is to say, your lives will not shine before men unless your activities are offered to God. The smallest taint of making self your end, your law, or your strength, mingling with your lives, and manifest in their actions, will dim the light which shines from them, and men will be very quick to find out and say, 'He calls himself a Christian; but he lives for himself.' Neither the light, which is the radiance of a Christian life manwards, can be sustained without the offering of the life in its depths to God, nor can the activities of the life be acceptably offered to Him, unless the man that offers them 'lets his light shine before men.' The lamp and the table must go together.

The lamp and the table must together be offshoots from the altar. If there be not in the centre of the life aspiration after Him in the depths of the heart, communion with Him in the silent places of the soul, then there will be little brightness in the life to ray out amongst men, and there will be little consecration of the activities to be laid before God. The reason why the manifold bustle and busy-ness of the Christian Church to-day sows so much and reaps so little, lies mainly here, that they have forgotten to a large extent how the altar in the centre must give the oil for the lamp to shine, and the grain to be made into the loaves. And, on the other hand, the altar in the middle needs both its flanking accompaniments. For the Christian life is to be no life of cloistered devotion and heavenward aspiration only or mainly, but is to manifest its still devotion and its heavenward aspiration by the consecration of its activities to God, and the raying of them out into a darkened world. The service of man is the service of God, for lamp and table are offshoots of the altar. But the service of God is the basis of the best service of man, for the altar stands between the lamp and the table.

So, brethren, let us blend these three aspects into a unity, the Altar, the Lamp, the Table, and so shall we minister aright, and men will call us the 'priests of the Most High God,' till we pass within the veil where, better than the best of us here can do, we shall be able to unite still communion and active service, and shine as the sun in the Kingdom of our Father. 'His servants shall serve Him' with priestly ministrations, 'and shall see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads.'

THE GOLDEN LAMPSTAND

'Thou shalt make a candlestick of pure gold. . . .'—EXODUS xxv. 31.

IF we could have followed the Jewish priest as he passed in his daily ministrations into the Inner Court, we should have seen that he first piled the incense on the altar which stood in its centre, and then turned to trim the lamps of the golden candlestick which flanked it on one side. Of course it was not a candlestick, as our versions misleadingly render the word. That was an article of furniture unknown in those days. It was a lampstand; from a central upright stem branched off on either side three arms decorated with what the Book calls 'beaten work,' and what we in modern jewellers' technicality call *répoussé* work, each of which bore on its top, like a flower on its stalk, a shallow cup filled with oil, in which a wick floated. There were thus seven lamps in all, including that on the central stem. The material was costly, the work adorning it was artistic, the oil with which it was fed was carefully prepared, the number of its lamps expressed perfection, it was daily trimmed by the priest, and there, all through the night, it burned, the one spot of light in a dark desert.

Now, this Inner Court of the Tabernacle or Temple was intended, with its furniture, to be symbolical of the life of Israel, the priestly nation. The Altar of Incense, which was the main article of ecclesiastical equipment there, and stood in the central place, represented the life of Israel in its Godward aspect, as being a life of continual devotion. The Candlestick on the one hand, and the Table of Shew-bread on the other, were likewise symbolical of other aspects of that same life. I have to deal now with the meaning and lessons of this golden lampstand, and it teaches us—

I. The office manwards of the Church and of the individual Christian.

Let me just for a moment recall the various instances in which this symbol reappears in Scripture. We have, in the vision of the prophet who sustained and animated the spirits of Israel in their Restoration, the repetition of the emblem, in the great golden candlestick which Zechariah saw, fed by two 'olive trees,' one on either side of it; and in the last book of

Scripture we have that most significant and lovely variation of it, the reappearance, not of the *one* golden candlestick or lampstand, but of *seven*. The formal unity is at an end, but the seven constitute a better, more vital unity, because Christ is in the midst. We may learn the lesson that the Christian conception of the oneness of the Church towers above the Jewish conception of the oneness of Israel by all the difference that there is between a mere mechanical, external unity, and a vital oneness—because all are partakers of the one Christ. I may recall, also, how our Lord, in that great programme of the Kingdom which Matthew has gathered together in what we call 'the Sermon on the Mount,' immediately after the Beatitudes, goes on to speak of the office of His people under the two metaphors of 'the salt of the earth' and 'the light of the world,' and immediately connects with the latter of the two a reference to a lamp lit and set upon its stand; and clinches the whole by the exhortation, 'Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.'

A remarkable and beautiful variation of that exhortation is found in one of the Apostolic writings when Paul, instead of saying, 'Ye are the light of the world,' says, 'Shine as lights in the world,' and so gives us the individual, as well as the collective and ecclesiastical, aspect of these great functions. That is a hint that is very much needed. Christian people are quite willing to admit that the Church, the abstraction, the generalisation, is 'the light of the world.' But they are wofully apt to slip their own necks out from under the yoke of the obligation, and to forget that the collective light is only the product of the millions of individual lights rushing together—just as in some gas-lights you have a whole series of minute punctures, each of which gives out its own little jet of radiance, and all run together into one brilliant circle. So do not let us escape the personal pressure of this office, or lay it all on the broad shoulders of that generalised abstraction 'the Church.' But, since the collective light is but the product of the individual small shinings, let us take the two lessons: first, contribute our part to the general lustre; second, be content with having our part lost in the general light.

But now let me turn for a little while to the more specific meaning of this symbol. The life which, by the central position of the Altar of Incense, was symbolised as being centrally, essentially in its depths and primarily, a life of habitual devotion and communion with God, in its manward aspect is a life that shines 'to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' That is the solemn obligation, the ideal function, of the Christian Church and of each individual who professes to belong to it. Now, if you recur to our Lord's own application of this metaphor, to which I have already referred, you will see that the first and foremost way by which Christian communities and individuals discharge this function is by conduct. 'Let your light so shine before men'—that they may hear your eloquent proclamation of the Gospel? No! 'Let your light so shine before men'—that you may convince the gainsayers by argument, or move the hard-hearted by appeals and exhortations; that you may preach and talk? No! 'That *they may see your good works*, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.' We may say of the Christian community, and of the Christian individual, with all reverence, what the Scripture in an infinitely deeper and more sacred sense says of Jesus Christ Himself, 'the life was the light.' It is conduct, whereby most effectually, most universally, and with the least risk of rousing antagonism and hostile feelings, Christian people may 'shine as lights in the world.' For we all know how the inconsistencies of a Christian man block the path of the Gospel far more than a hundred sermons or talks further it. We all know how there are people, plenty of them, who, however illogically yet most naturally, compare our lives in their daily action with our professed beliefs, and, saying to themselves, 'I do not see that there is much difference between them and me,' draw the conclusion that it matters very little whether a man is a Christian or not, seeing that the conduct of the men who profess to be so is little more radiant, bright with purity and knowledge and joy, than is the conduct of others. Dear brethren, you can do far more to help or hinder the spread of Christ's Kingdom by the way in which you do common things, side by side with men who are not partakers of the 'like precious faith' with yourselves, than I or my fellow-preachers can do by all our words. It is all very well to lecture about the efficiency of a machine; let us see it at work, and that will convince people. We preach; but you preach far more eloquently, and far more effectively, by your lives. 'In all labour,' says the Book of Proverbs, 'there is profit'—which we may divert from its original meaning to signify that in all Christian living there is force to attract—'but the talk of the lips tendeth only to poverty.' Oh! if the Christian men and women of England would live their Christianity, they would do more to convert the unconverted, and to draw in the outcasts, than all of us preachers can do. 'From you,' said the Apostle once to a church very young, and just rescued from the evils of heathenism—'from you sounded out,' as if blown from a trumpet, 'the Word of the Lord, so that we need not to speak anything.' Live the life, and thereby you diffuse the light.

Nor need we forget that this most potent of all weapons is one that can be wielded by all Christian people. Our gifts differ. Some of us cannot speak for Jesus; some of us who think we can had often better hold our tongues. But we can all live like and for Him. And this most potent and universally diffused possibility is also the weapon that can be wielded with least risk of failure. There is a certain assumption, which it is often difficult to swallow, in a Christian man's addressing another on the understanding that he, the speaker, possesses something which the other lacks. By words we may often repel, and often find that the ears that we seek to enter with our message close themselves against us and are unwilling to hear. But there is no chance of offending anybody, or of repelling anybody, by living Christlike. We can all do that, and it is the largest contribution that any of us can make to the collective light which shines out from the Christian Church.

But, brethren, we have to remember that there are dangers attending the life that reveals its hidden principles as being faith in Christ and obedience to Him. Did you ever notice how, in the Sermon on the Mount, there are two sets of precepts which seem diametrically opposite to one another? There is a whole series of illustrations of the one commandment, 'Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them,' and then there is the precept, 'Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works.' So that whilst, on the one hand, there is to be the manifestation in daily conduct of the inner principles that animate us, on the other hand, if there comes in the least taint or trace of ostentation, everything is spoiled, and the light is darkness. The light of the sun makes all things visible and hides itself. We do not see the sunbeams, but we see what the sunbeams illuminate. It is the coarser kinds of light which are themselves separately visible, and they are so only because they have not power enough to make everything around them as brilliant as they themselves are. So our light is to be silent, our light is—if I might use such a phrase—to hide itself in 'a glorious privacy,' whilst it enables men to see, even through our imperfect ministration, the face of our Father in Heaven.

But let me remind you that the same variation by Paul of our Lord's words to which I have already referred as bringing out the difference between the collective and the individual function, also brings out another difference; for Paul says, 'Ye shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life.' He slightly varies the metaphor. We are no longer regarded as being ourselves illuminants, but simply as being the stands on which the light is placed. And that means that whilst the witness by life is the mightiest, the most universally possible, and the least likely to offend, there must also be, as occasion shall serve, without cowardice, without shamefaced reticence, the proclamation of the great Gospel which has made us 'lights in the world.' And that is a function which every Christian man can discharge too, though I have just been saying that they cannot all preach and speak; for every Christian soul has some other soul to whom its word comes with a force that none other can have.

So the one office that is set forth here is the old familiar one, the obligation of which is fully recognised by us all, and pitifully ill-discharged by any of us, to shine by our daily life, and to shine by the actual communication by speech of 'the Name that is above every name.' That is the ideal; alas for the reality! 'Ye are the light of the world.' What kind of light do we—the Church of Christ that gathers here—ray out into the darkness of Manchester? Socially, intellectually, morally, in the civic life, in the national life, are Christian people in the van? They ought to be. There is a church clock in our city which has a glass dial that professes to be illuminated at night, so that the passer-by may tell the hour; but it is generally burning so dimly that nobody can see on its grimy face what o'clock it is. That is like a great many of our churches, and I ask you to ask yourselves whether it is like you or not—a dark lantern, a most imperfectly illuminated dial, which gives no guidance and no information to anybody.

This golden lampstand teaches us—

II. How this office is to be discharged.

Remember simply these two points. It stood, as I have already said, on one side of the Altar of Incense which was central to everything. It was daily tended by the priests, and fed with fresh oil. Hence we may derive some important practical lessons.

To begin with, we note that our light is a derived light, and therefore can only be kept bright when we keep close to the source from whence it is derived.

'That was the true Light, which coming into the world lighteth every man'—there is the source of all illumination, in Jesus Christ Himself. He alone is *the* Light, and as for all others we must say of them what was said of His great forerunner, 'Not that light, but sent to bear witness of that light'; and again, 'he was a light kindled,' and therefore 'shining,' and so his shining was but 'for a season.' But Jesus is for ever the light of the world, and all our illumination comes from Him. As Paul says, 'Now are ye light in the Lord,' therefore only in the measure in which we are 'in the Lord,' shall we be light. Keep near to Him and you will shine; break the connection with Him, and you are darkness, darkness for yourselves, and darkness for the world. Switch off, and the light is darkness.

Change the metaphor, and instead of saying 'derived light' say 'reflected light.' *There* is a pane of glass in a cottage, miles away across the moor. It was invisible a moment ago, and suddenly it gleams like a diamond. Why? The sun has struck it; and in a moment after it will be invisible again. As long as Jesus Christ is shining on my heart, so long, and not a moment longer, shall I give forth the light that will illumine the world. Astronomers have a contrivance by which they can keep a photographic film on which they are seeking to get the image of a star, moving along with the movement of the heavens, so that on the same spot the star shall always shine. We have to keep ourselves steady beneath the white beam from Jesus, and then we, too, shall be 'light in the Lord.'

Our light is fed light. Daily came the priest, daily the oil that had been exhausted by shining was replenished. We all know what that oil means and is;

the Divine Spirit which comes into every heart which is open by faith in Christ, and which abides in every heart where there are desire, obedience, and the following of Him; which can be quenched by my sin, by my negligence, by my ceasing to wish it, by my not using its gifts when I have them; which can be grieved by my inconsistencies, and by the spots of darkness that so often take up more of the sphere of my life than the spots of illumination. But we can have as much of that oil of the Divine Spirit, the 'unction from the Holy One,' as we desire, and expect, and use. And unless we have, dear brethren, there is no shining for us. This generation in its abundant activities tends to a Christianity which has more spindles than power, which is more surface than depth, which is so anxious to do service that it forgets the preliminary of all right service, patient, solitary, silent communion with God. Suffer the word of exhortation—let shining be second, let replenishing with the oil be first. First the Altar of Incense, then the Candlestick.

III. This golden lampstand tells us of the fatal effect of neglecting the Church's and the individual's duty.

Where is the seven-branched candlestick of the second Temple? No one knows. Possibly, according to one statement, it lies at the bottom of the Mediterranean. Certainly we know that it is pictured on that sad panel in the conqueror's arch at Rome, and that it became a trophy of the insolent victor. It disappeared, and the Israel whom it vainly endeavoured through the centuries to stir to a consciousness of its vocation, has never since had a gleam of light to ray out into the world. Where are the seven candlesticks, which made a blessed unity because Christ walked in their midst? Where are the churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Philadelphia, Thyatira, and the rest? Where they stood the mosque is reared, and from its minaret day by day rings out—not the proclamation of the Name, but—'There is no God but God, and Mahomet is His Prophet.' The Pharos that ought to have shone out over stormy seas has been seized by wreckers, and its light is blinded, and false lights lure the mariner to the shoals and to shipwreck.

'Take heed lest He also spare not thee.' O brethren! is it not a bitter irony to call *us* 'lights of the world'? Let us penitently recognise the inconsistencies of our lives, and the reticence of our speech. Let us not lose sight of the high ideal, that we may the more penitently recognise the miserable falling short of our reality. And let us be thankful that *the* Priest is tending the lamps. 'He will not quench the smoking wick,' but will replenish it with oil, and fan the dying flame. Only let us not resist His ministrations, which are always gentle, even when He removes the charred blacknesses that hinder our being what we should be, and may be, if we will—lights of the world. 'Arise! shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.'

THE NAMES ON AARON'S BREASTPLATE

'Aaron shall bear their names before the Lord, upon his two shoulders, for a memorial. . . . And Aaron shall bear the names of the Children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart, when he goeth in unto the Holy Place.'—EXODUS xxviii. 12, 29.

EVERY part of the elaborately prescribed dress of the high priest was significant. But the significance of the whole was concentrated in the inscription upon his mitre, 'Holiness to the Lord,' and in those others upon his breastplate and his shoulder.

The breastplate was composed of folded cloth, in which were lodged twelve precious stones, in four rows of three, each stone containing the name of one of the tribes. It was held in position by the ephod, which consisted of another piece of cloth, with a back and front part, which were united into one on the shoulders. On each shoulder it was clasped by an onyx stone bearing the names of six of the tribes. Thus twice, on the shoulders, the seat of power, and on the heart, the organ of thought and of love, Aaron, entering into the presence of the Most High, bore 'the names of the tribes for a memorial continually.'

Now, I think we shall not be indulging in the very dangerous amusement of unduly spiritualising the externalities of that old law if we see here, in these two things, some very important lessons.

I. The first one that I would suggest to you is—here we have the expression of the great truth of representation of the people by the priest.

The names of the tribes laid upon Aaron's heart and on his shoulders indicated the significance of his office—that he represented Israel before God, as truly as he represented God to Israel. For the moment the personality of the official was altogether melted away and absorbed in the sanctity of his function, and he stood before God as the individualised nation. Aaron was Israel, and Israel was Aaron, for the purposes of worship. And that was indicated by the fact that here, on the shoulders from which, according to an obvious symbol, all acts of power emanate, and on the heart from which, according to most natural metaphor, all the outgoings of the personal life proceed, were written the names of the tribes. That meant, 'This man standing here is the Israel of God, the concentrated nation.'

The same thought works the other way. The nation is the diffused priest, and all its individual components are consecrated to God. All this was external ceremonial, with no real spiritual fact at the back of it. But it pointed onwards to something that is not ceremonial. It pointed to this, that the true priest must, in like manner, gather up into himself, and in a very profound sense be, the people for whom he is the priest; and that they, in their turn, by the action of their own minds and hearts and wills, must consent to and recognise that representative relation, which comes to the solemn height of identification in Christ's relation to His people. 'I am the Vine, ye are the branches,' says He, and also, 'That they all may be one in us as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee.' So Paul says, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' 'The life which I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God.'

So Christ gathers us all, if we will let Him, into Himself; and our lives may be hid with Him—in a fashion that is more than mere external and formal representation, or as people have a member of Parliament to represent them in the councils of the nation—even in a true union with Him in whom is the life of all of us, if we live in any real sense. Aaron bore the names of the tribes on shoulder and heart, and Israel was Aaron, and Aaron was Israel.

II. Further, we see here, in these eloquent symbols, the true significance of intercession.

Now, that is a word and a thought which has been wofully limited and made shallow and superficial by the unfortunate confining of the expression, in our ordinary language, to a mere action by speech. Intercession is supposed to be verbal asking for some good to be bestowed on, or some evil to be averted from, some one in whom we are interested. But the Old Testament notion of the priest's intercession, and the New Testament use of the word which we so render, go far beyond any verbal utterances, and reach to the very heart of things. Intercession, in the true sense of the word, means the doing of any act whatsoever before God for His people by Jesus Christ. Whensoever, as in the presence of God, He brings to God anything which is His, that is intercession. He undertakes for them, not by words only, though His mighty word is, 'I will that they whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am,' but by acts which are more than even the words of the Incarnate Word.

If we take these two inscriptions upon which I am now commenting, we shall get, I think, what covers the whole ground of the intercession on which Christians are to repose their souls. For, with regard to the one of them, we read that the high priest's breastplate was named 'the breastplate of judgment'; and what that means is explained by the last words of the verse following that from which my text is taken: 'Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before the Lord.' Judgment means a judicial sentence; in this case a judicial sentence of acquittal. And that Aaron stood before God in the Holy Place, ministering with this breastplate upon his heart, is explained by the writer of these regulations to mean that he carried there the visible manifestation of Israel's acquittal, based upon his own sacrificial function. Now, put that into plain

English, and it is just this—Jesus Christ's sacrifice ensures, for all those whose names are written on these gems on His heart, their acquittal in the judgment of Heaven. Or, in other words, the first step in the intercession of our great High Priest is the presenting before God for ever and ever that great fact that He, the Sinless, has died for the love of sinful men, and thereby has secured that the judgment of Heaven on them shall now be 'no condemnation.' Brethren, there is the root of all our hope in Christ, and of all that Christ is to individuals and to society—the assurance that the breastplate of judgment is on His heart, as a sign that all who trust Him are acquitted by the tribunal of Heaven.

The other side of this great continual act of intercession is set forth by the other symbol—the names written on the shoulders, the seat of power. There is a beautiful parallel, which yet at first sight does not seem to be one, to the thought that lies here, in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, where, addressing the restored and perfected Israel, he says, speaking in the person of Jehovah: 'I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands.' That has precisely the same meaning that I take to be conveyed by this symbol in the text. The names of the tribes are written on His shoulders; and not until that arm is wearied or palsied, not till that strong hand forgets its cunning, will our defence fail. If our names are thus written on the seat of power, that means that all the divine authority and omnipotence which Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of the Father, wields in His state of royal glory, are exercised on behalf of, or at all events on the side of, those whose names He thus bears upon His shoulders. That is the guarantee for each of us that our hands shall be made strong, according to the ancient prophetic blessing, 'by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.' Just as a father or a mother will take their child's little tremulous hand in theirs and hold it, that it may be strengthened for some small task beyond its unbacked, uninvigorated power; so Jesus Christ will give us strength within, and also will order the march of His Providence and send the gift of His Spirit, for the succour and the strengthening of all whose names are written on His ephod. He has gone within the veil. He has left us heavy tasks, but our names are on His shoulders, and we 'can do all things in Christ who strengtheneth us.'

III. Still further, this symbol suggests to us the depth and reality of Christ's sympathy.

The heart is, in our language, the seat of love. It is not so in the Old Testament. Affection is generally allocated to another part of the frame; but here the heart stands for the organ of care, of thought, of interest. For, according to the Old Testament view of the relation between man's body and man's soul, the very seat and centre of the individual life is in the heart. I suppose that was because it was known that, somehow or other, the blood came thence. Be that as it may, the thought is clear throughout all the Old Testament that the heart is the man, and the man is the heart. And so, if Jesus bears our names upon His heart, that does not express merely representation nor merely intercession, but it expresses also personal regard, individualising knowledge. For Aaron wore not one great jewel with 'Israel' written on it, but twelve little ones, with 'Dan,' 'Benjamin,' and 'Ephraim,' and all the rest of them, each on his own gem

So we can say, 'Such a High Priest became us, who could have compassion upon the ignorant, and upon them that are out of the way'; and we can fall back on that old-fashioned but inexhaustible source of consolation and strength: 'In all their affliction He was afflicted'; and though the noise of the tempests which toss us can scarcely be supposed to penetrate into the veiled place where He dwells on high, yet we may be sure—and take all the peace and consolation and encouragement out of it that it is meant to give us—that 'we have not a High Priest that cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities,' but that Himself, having known miseries, 'is able to succour them that are tempted.' Our names are on Christ's heart.

IV. Then, lastly, we have here a suggestion of how precious to Aaron Israel is.

Jewels were chosen to symbolise the tribes. Bits of tin, potsherds, or anything else that one could have scratched letters upon, would have done quite as well. But 'the precious things of the everlasting mountains' were chosen to bear the dear names. 'The Lord's portion is His people'; and precious in the eyes of Christ are the souls for whom He has given so much. They are not only precious, but lustrous, flashing back the light in various colours indeed, according to their various laws of crystallisation, but all receptive of it and all reflective of it. I said that the names on the breastplate of judgment expressed the acquittal and acceptance of Israel. But does Christ's work for us stop with simple acquittal? Oh no! 'Whom He justified them He also glorified.' And if our souls are 'bound in the bundle of life,' and our names are written on the heart of the Christ, be sure that mere forgiveness and acquittal is the least of the blessings which He intends to give, and that He will not be satisfied until in all our nature we receive and flash back the light of His own glory.

It is very significant in this aspect that the names of the twelve tribes are described as being written on the precious stones which make the walls of the New Jerusalem. Thus borne on Christ's heart whilst He is within the veil and we are in the outer courts, we may hope to be carried by His sustaining and perfecting hand into the glories, and be made participant of the glories. Let us see to it that we write His name on our hearts, on their cares, their thought, their love, and on our hands, on their toiling and their possessing; and then, God helping us, and Christ dwelling in us, we shall come to the blessed state of those who serve Him, and bear His name flaming conspicuous for ever on their foreheads.

THREE INSCRIPTIONS WITH ONE MEANING

'Thou shalt make a plate of pure gold, and grave upon it . . . HOLINESS TO THE LORD.'—EXODUS xxviii. 36.

'In that day there shall be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD.'—ZECH. xiv. 20.

'His name shall be in their foreheads.'—REV. xxii. 4.

YOU will have perceived my purpose in putting these three widely separated texts together. They all speak of inscriptions, and they are all obviously connected with each other. The first of them comes from the ancient times of the institution of the ceremonial ritual, and describes a part of the high priest's official dress. In his mitre was a thin plate of gold on which was written, 'Holiness to the Lord.' The second of them comes from almost the last portion recorded of the history of Israel in the Old Testament, and is from the words of the great Prophet of the Restoration—his ideal presentation of the Messianic period, in which he recognises as one feature, that the inscription on the mitre of the high priest shall be written on 'the bells of the horses.' And the last of them is from the closing vision of the celestial kingdom, the heavenly and perfected form of the Christian Church. John, probably remembering the high priest and his mitre, with its inscription upon the forehead, says: 'His servants shall do Him priestly service'—for that is the meaning of the word inadequately translated 'serve Him'—'and see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads.'

These three things, then—the high priest's mitre, the horses' bells, the foreheads of the perfected saints—present three aspects of the Christian thought of holiness. Take them one by one.

I. The high priest's mitre.

The high priest was the official representative of the nation. He stood before God as the embodied and personified Israel. For the purposes of worship Israel was the high priest, and the high priest was Israel. And so, on his forehead, not to distinguish him from the rest of the people, but to include all the people in his consecration, shone a golden plate with the motto, 'Holiness to the Lord.' So, at the very beginning of Jewish ritual there stands a protest against all notions that make 'saint' the designation of any abnormal or exceptional sanctity, and confine the name to the members of any selected aristocracy of devoutness and goodness. All Christian men, *ex officio*, by the very fact of their Christianity, are saints, in the true sense of the word. And the representative of the whole of Israel stood there before God, with this inscription blazing on his forehead, as a witness that, whatsoever holiness may be, it belongs to every member of the true Israel.

And what is it? It is a very unfortunate thing—indicating superficiality of thought—that the modern popular notion of 'holiness' identifies it with purity, righteousness, moral perfection. Now that idea *is* in it, but is not the whole of it. For, not to spend time upon mere remarks on words, the meaning of the word thus rendered is in Hebrew, as well as in Greek and in our own English, one and the same. The root-meaning is 'separated,' 'set apart,' and the word expresses primarily, not moral character, but relation to God. That makes all the difference; and it incalculably deepens the conception, as well as puts us on the right track for understanding the only possible means by which there can ever be realised that moral perfection and excellence which has unfortunately monopolised the meaning of the word in most people's minds. The first thought is 'set apart to God.' That is holiness, in its root and germ.

And how can we be set apart for God? You may devote a dead thing for certain uses easily enough. How can a man be separated and laid aside?

Well, there is only one way, brethren, and that is by self-surrender. 'Yield yourselves to God' is but the other side, or, rather, the practical shape, of the Old and the New Testament doctrine of holiness. A man becomes God's when he says, 'Lord, take me and mould me, and fill me and cleanse me, and do with me what Thou wilt.' In that self-surrender, which is the tap-root of all holiness, the first and foremost thing to be offered is that most obstinate of all, the will that is in us. And when we yield our wills in submission both to commandments and providences, both to gifts and to withdrawals, both to gains and to losses, both to joys and to sorrows, then we begin to write upon our foreheads 'Holiness to the Lord.' And when we go on to yield our hearts to Him, by enshrining Him sole and sovereign in their innermost chamber, and turning to Him the whole current of our lives and desires, and hopes and confidences, which we are so apt to allow to run to waste and be sucked up in the desert sands of the world, then we write more of that inscription. And when we fill our minds with joyful submission to His truth, and occupy our thoughts with His mighty Name and His great revelation, and carry Him with us in the hidden corners of our consciousness, even whilst we are busy about daily work, then we add further letters to it. And when the submissive will, and the devoted heart, and the occupied thoughts are fully expressed in daily life and its various external duties, then the writing is complete. 'Holiness to the Lord' is self-surrender of will and heart and mind and everything. And that surrender is of the very essence of Christianity.

What is a saint? Some man or woman that has practised unheard-of austerities? Somebody that has lived an isolated and self-regarding life in convent or monastery or desert? No! a man or woman in the world who, moved by the mercies of God, yields self to God as 'a living sacrifice.'

So the New Testament writers never hesitate to speak even of such very imperfect Christians as were found in abundance in churches like Corinth and Galatia as being all 'saints,' every man of them. That is not because the writers were minimising their defects, or idealising their persons, but because, if they are Christians at all, they are saints; seeing that no man is a Christian who has not been drawn by Christ's great sacrifice for him to yield himself a sacrifice for Christ.

Of course that intrusive idea which has, in popular apprehension, so swallowed up the notion of holiness—viz. that of perfection of moral character or conduct—is included in this other, or rather is developed from it. For the true way to conquer self is to surrender self; and the more entire our giving up of ourselves, the more certainly shall we receive ourselves back again from His hands. 'By the mercies of God, I beseech you, yield yourselves living sacrifices.'

II. I come to my next text—the horses' bells.

Zechariah has a vision of the ideal Messianic times, and, of course, as must necessarily be the case, his picture is painted with colours laid upon his palette by his experience, and he depicts that distant future in the guise suggested to him by what he saw around him. So we have to disentangle from his words the sentiment which he expresses, and to recognise the symbolic way in which he puts it. His thought is this,—the inscription on the high priest's mitre will be written on the bells which ornament the harness of the horses, which in Israel were never used as with us, but only either for war or for pomp and display, and the use of which was always regarded with a certain kind of doubt and suspicion. Even these shall be consecrated in that far-off day.

And then he goes on with variations on the same air, 'In that day there shall be upon the bells of the horses, "Holiness unto the Lord,"' and adds that 'the pots in the Lord's house'—the humble vessels that were used for the most ordinary parts of the Temple services—'shall be like the bowls before the altar,' into which the sacred blood of the offerings was poured. The most external and secular thing bearing upon religion shall be as sacred as the sacredest. But that is not all. 'Yea! every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the Lord of hosts, and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them,' and put their offerings therein. That is to say, the coarse pottery vessels that were in every poverty-stricken house in the city shall be elevated to the rank of the sacred vessels of the Temple. Domestic life with all its secularities shall be hallowed. The kitchens of Jerusalem shall be as truly places of worship as is the inner shrine of the Most High.

On the whole, the prophet's teaching is that, in the ideal state of man upon earth, there will be an entire abolition of the distinction between 'sacred' and 'secular'; a distinction that has wrought infinite mischief in the world, and in the lives of Christian people.

Let me translate these words of our prophet into English equivalents. Every cup and tumbler in a poor man's kitchen may be as sacred as the communion chalice that passes from lip to lip with the 'blood of Jesus Christ' in it. Every common piece of service that we do, down among the vulgarities and the secularities and the meannesses of daily life, may be lifted up to stand upon precisely the same level as the sacredest office that we undertake. The bells of the horses may jingle to the same tune as the trumpets of the priests sounded within the shrine, and on all, great and small, may be written, 'Holiness to the Lord.'

But let us remember that that universally diffused sanctity will need to have a centre of diffusion, else there will be no diffusion, and that all life will become sacred when the man that lives it has 'Holiness to the Lord' written on his forehead, and not else. If that be the inscription on the driver's heart, the horses that he drives will have it written on their bells, but they will not have it unless it be. Holy men make all things holy. 'To the pure all things are pure,' but unto them that are unclean and disobedient there is nothing pure. Hallow thyself, and all things are clean unto thee.

III. And so I come to my third text—the perfected saints' foreheads.

The connection between the first and the last of these texts is as plain and close as between the first and the second. For John in his closing vision gives emphasis to the priestly idea as designating in its deepest relations the redeemed and perfected Christian Church. Therefore he says, as I have already explained, 'His servants shall do Him *priestly* service, and His name shall be in their foreheads.' The old official dress of the high priest comes into his mind, and he paints the future, just as Zechariah did, under the forms of the past, and sees before the throne the perfected saints, each man of them with that inscription clear and conspicuous.

But there is an advance in his words which I think it is not fanciful to note. It is only the *name* that is written in the perfected saint's forehead. Not the 'Holiness unto the Lord,' but just the bare name. What does that mean? Well, it means the same as your writing your name in one of your books does, or as when a man puts his initials on the back of his oxen, or as the old practice of branding the master's mark upon the slave did. It means absolute ownership.

But it means something more. The name is the manifested personality, the revealed God, or, as we say in an abstract way, the character of God. That Name is to be in the foreheads of His perfected people. How does it come to be there? Read also the clause before the text—'His servants shall see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads.' That is to say, the perfected condition is not reached by surrender only, but by assimilation; and that assimilation comes by contemplation. The faces that are turned to Him, and behold Him, are smitten with the light and shine, and those that look upon them see 'as it had been the face of an angel,' as the Sanhedrim saw that of Stephen, when he beheld the Son of Man 'standing at the right hand of God.'

My last text is but a picturesque way of saying what the writer of it says in plain words when he declares, 'We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.' The name is to be 'in their foreheads,' where every eye can see it. Alas! alas! it is so hard for us to live out our best selves, and to show to the world what is in us. Cowardice, sheepishness, and a hundred other reasons prevent it. In this poor imperfect state no emotion ever takes shape and visibility without losing more or less of its beauty. But yonder the obstructions to self-manifestation will be done away; and 'when He shall be manifested, we also shall be manifested with Him in glory.'

'Then shall the righteous blaze forth like the sun in My heavenly Father's Kingdom.' But the beginning of it all is 'Holiness to the Lord' written on our hearts; and the end of that is the vision which is impossible without holiness, and which leads on to the beholder's perfect likeness to bis Lord.

THE ALTAR OF INCENSE

Thou shalt make an altar to burn incense upon.'—EXODUS xxx. 1.

CEREMONIES are embodied thoughts. Religious ceremonies are moulded by, and seek to express, the worshipper's conception of his God, and his own relation to Him; his aspirations and his need. Of late years scholars have been busy studying the religions of the more backward races, and explaining rude and repulsive rites by pointing to the often profound and sometimes beautiful ideas underlying them. When that process is applied to Australian and Fijian savages, it is honoured as a new and important study; when we apply it to the Mosaic Ritual it is pooh-poohed as 'foolish spiritualising.' Now, no doubt, there has been a great deal of nonsense talked in regard to this matter, and a great deal of ingenuity wasted in giving a Christian meaning—or, may I say, a Christian twist?—to every pin of the Tabernacle, and every detail of the ritual. Of course, to exaggerate a truth is the surest way to discredit a truth, but the truth remains true all the same, and underneath that elaborate legislation, which makes such wearisome and profitless reading for the most of us, in the Pentateuch, there lie, if we can only grasp them, great thoughts and lessons that we shall all be the better for pondering.

To one item of these, this altar of incense, I call attention now, because it is rich in suggestions, and leads us into very sacred regions of the Christian life which are by no means so familiar to many of us as they ought to be. Let me just for one moment state the facts with which I wish to deal. The Jewish

Tabernacle, and subsequently the Temple, were arranged in three compartments: the outermost court, which was accessible to all the people; the second, which was trodden by the priests alone; and the third, where the Shechinah dwelt in solitude, broken only once a year by the foot of the High Priest. That second court we are concerned with now. There are three pieces of ecclesiastical furniture in it: an altar in the centre, flanked on either side by a great lampstand, and a table on which were piled loaves. It is to that central piece of furniture that I ask your attention now, and to the thoughts that underlie it, and the lessons that it teaches.

I. This altar shows us what prayer is.

Suppose we had been in that court when in the morning or in the evening the priest came with the glowing pan of coals from another altar in the outer court, and laid it on this altar, and heaped upon it the sticks of incense, we should have seen the curling, fragrant wreaths ascending till 'the House was filled with smoke,' as a prophet once saw it. We should not have wanted any interpreter to tell us what that meant. What could that rising cloud of sweet odours signify but the ascent of the soul towards God? Put that into more abstract words, and it is just the old, hackneyed commonplace which I seek to try to freshen a little now, that incense is the symbol of prayer. That that is so is plain enough, not only from the natural propriety of the case, but because you find the identification distinctly stated in several places in Scripture, of which I quote but two instances. In one psalm we read, 'Let my prayer come before Thee as incense.' In the Book of the Apocalypse we read of 'golden bowls full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.' And that the symbolism was understood by, and modified the practice of, the nation, we are taught when we read that whilst Zechariah the priest was within the court offering incense, as it was his lot to do, 'the whole multitude of the people were without praying,' doing that which the priest within the court symbolised by his offering. So then we come to this, dear friends, that we fearfully misunderstand and limit the nobleness and the essential character of prayer when, as we are always tempted to do by our inherent self-regard, we make petition its main feature and form. Of course, so long as we are what we shall always be in this world, needy and sinful creatures; and so long as we are what we shall ever be in all worlds, creatures absolutely dependent for life and everything on the will and energy of God, petition must necessarily be a very large part of prayer. But the more we grow into His likeness, and the more we understand the large privileges and the glorious possibilities which lie in prayer, the more will the relative proportions of its component parts be changed, and petition will become less, and aspiration will become more. The essence of prayer, the noblest form of it, is thus typified by the cloud of sweet odours that went up before God.

In all true prayer there must be the lowest prostration in reverence before the Infinite Majesty. But the noblest prayer is that which lifts 'them that are bowed down' rather than that which prostrates men before an inaccessible Deity. And so, whilst we lie low at His feet, that may be the prayer of a mere theist, but when our hearts go out towards Him, and we are drawn to Himself, that is the prayer that befits Christian aspiration; the ascent of the soul toward God is the true essence of prayer. As one of the non-Christian philosophers—seekers after God, if ever there were such, and who, I doubt not, found Him whom they sought—has put it, 'the flight of the lonely soul to the only God'; that is prayer. Is that my prayer? We come to Him many a time burdened with some very real sorrow, or weighted with some pressing responsibility, and we should not be true to ourselves, or to Him, if our prayer did not take the shape of petition. But, as we pray, the blessing of the transformation of its character should be realised by us, and that which began with the cry for help and deliverance should always be, and it always will be, if the cry for help and deliverance has been of the right sort, sublimed into 'Thy face, Lord, will I seek.' The Book of Ecclesiastes describes death as the 'return of the spirit to God who gave it.' That is the true description of prayer, a going back to the fountain's source. Flames aspire; to the place 'whence the rivers came thither they return again.' The homing pigeon or the migrating bird goes straight through many degrees of latitude, and across all sorts of weather, to the place whence it came. Ah! brethren, let us ask ourselves if our spirits thus aspire and soar. Do we know what it is to be, if I might so say, like those captive balloons that are ever yearning upwards, and stretching to the loftiest point permitted them by the cord that tethers them to earth?

Now another thought that this altar of incense may teach us is that the prayer that soars must be kindled. There is no fragrance in a stick of incense lying there. No wreaths of ascending smoke come from it. It has to be kindled before its sweet odour can be set free and ascend. That is why so much of our prayer is of no delight to God, and of no benefit to us, because it is not on fire with the flame of a heart kindled into love and thankfulness by the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The cold vapours lie like a winding-sheet down in the valleys until the sun smites them, warms them, and draws them up. And our desires will hover in the low levels, and be dank and damp, until they are drawn up to the heights by the warmth of the Sun of righteousness. Oh! brethren, the formality and the coldness, to say nothing of the inconsecutiveness and the interruptedness by rambling thoughts that we all know in our petitions, in our aspirations, are only to be cured in one way:—

'Come! shed abroad a Saviour's love,
And that will kindle ours.'

It is the stretched string that gives out musical notes; the slack one is dumb. And if we desire that we may be able to be sure, as our Master was, when He said, 'I know that Thou hearest me always,' we must pray as He did, of whom it is recorded that 'He prayed the more earnestly,' and 'was heard in that He feared.' The word rendered 'the more earnestly' carries in it a metaphor drawn from that very fact that I have referred to. It means 'with the more stretched-out extension and intensity.' If our prayers are to be heard as music in heaven, they must come from a stretched string.

Once more, this altar of incense teaches us that kindled prayer delights God. That emblem of the sweet odour is laid hold of with great boldness by more than one Old and New Testament writer, in order to express the marvellous thought that there is a mutual joy in the prayer of faith and love, and that it rises as 'an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God.' The cuneiform inscriptions give that thought with characteristic vividness and grossness when they speak about the gods being 'gathered like flies round the steam of the sacrifice.' We have the same thought, freed from all its grossness, when we think that the curling wreaths going up from a heart aspiring and enflamed, come to Him as a sweet odour, and delight His soul. People say, 'that is anthropomorphism—making God too like a man.' Well, man is like God, at any rate, and surely the teaching of that great name 'Father' carries with it the assurance that just as fathers of flesh are glad when they see that their children like best to be with them, so there is something analogous in that joy before the angels of heaven which the Father has, not only because of the prodigal who comes back, but because of the child who has long been with Him, and is ever seeking to nestle closer to His heart. The Psalmist was lost in wonder and thankfulness that he was able to say 'He was extolled with my tongue.' Surely it should be a gracious, encouraging, strengthening thought to us all, that even our poor aspirations may minister to the divine gladness.

Now let us turn to another thought.

II. This altar shows us where prayer stands in the Christian life.

There are two or three points in regard to its position which it is no fanciful spiritualising, but simply grasping the underlying meaning of the institution, if we emphasise. First, let me remind you that there was another altar in the outer court, whereon was offered the daily sacrifice for the sins of the people. That altar came first, and the sacrifice had to be offered on it first, before the priest came into the inner court with the coals from that altar, and the incense kindled by them. What does that say to us? The altar of incense is not approached until we have been to the altar of sacrifice. It is no mere arbitrary appointment, nor piece of evangelical narrowness, which says that there is no real access to God, in all the fullness and reality of His revealed character for us sinful men, until our sins have been dealt with, taken away by the Lamb of God, sacrificed for us. And it is simply the transcript of experience which declares that there will be little inclination or desire to come to God with the sacrifice of praise and prayer until we have been to Christ, the sacrifice of propitiation and pardon. Brethren, we need to be cleansed, and we can only be delivered from the unholiness which is the perpetual and necessary barrier to our vision of God by making our very own, through simple faith, the energy and the blessedness of that great Sacrifice of propitiation. Then, and then only, do we properly come to the altar of incense. Its place in the Christian life is second, not first. 'First be reconciled to thy' Father, 'then lay' the incense 'on the altar.'

Again, great and deep lessons are given to us in the place of our altar in regard to the other articles that stood in that inner court. I have said that there were three of them. In the centre this altar of incense; on the one hand the great lampstand; on the other hand the table with loaves thereon. The one symbolised Israel's function in the world to be its light, which is our function too, and the other with loaves thereon symbolised the consecration to God of Israel's activities, and their results.

But between the two, central to both, stood the altar of incense. What does that say as to the place of prayer, defined as I have defined it, in the Christian life? It says this, that the light will burn dim and go out, and the loaves, the expression and the consequences of our activities, will become mouldy and dry, unless both are hallowed and sustained by prayer. And that lesson is one which we all need, and which I suppose this generation needs quite as much as, if not more than, any that has gone before it. For life has become so swift and rushing, and from all sides, the Church, the world, society, there come such temptations, and exhortations, and necessities, for strenuous and continuous work, that the basis of all wholesome and vigorous work, communion with God, is but too apt to be put aside and relegated to some inferior position. The carbon points of the electric arc-light are eaten away with tremendous rapidity in the very act of giving forth their illumination, and they need to be continually approximated and to be frequently renewed. The oil is burned away in the act of shining, and the lamp needs to be charged again. If we are to do our work in the world as its lights, and if we are to have any activities fit to be consecrated to God and laid on the Table before the Veil, it can only be by our making the altar of incense the centre, and these others subsidiary.

One last thought—the place of prayer in the Christian life is shadowed for us by the position of this altar in reference to 'the secret place of the Most High,' that mysterious inner court which was dark but for the Shechinah's light, and lonely but for the presence of the worshipping cherubim and the worshipped God. It stood, as we are told a verse or two after my text, 'before the veil.' A straight line drawn from the altar of sacrifice would have bisected the altar of incense as it passed into the mercy-seat and the glory. And that just tells us that the place of prayer in the Christian lift is that it is the direct way of coming close to God. Dear brother, we shall never lift the veil, and stand in 'the secret place of the Most High,' unless we take the altar of incense on our road.

There is one more thought here—

III. The altar of incense shows us how prayer is to be cultivated.

Twice a day, morning and evening, came the officiating priest with his pan of coals and incense, and laid it there; and during all the intervening hours between the morning and the evening the glow lay half hidden in the incense, and there was a faint but continual emission of fragrance from the smouldering mass that had been renewed in the morning, and again in the evening. And does not that say something to us? There must be definite times of distinct prayer if the aroma of devotion is to be diffused through our else scentless days. I ask for no pedantic adherence, with monastic mechanicalness, to hours and times, and forms of petitions. These are needful crutches to many of us. But what I do maintain is that all that talk which we hear so much of in certain quarters nowadays as to its not being necessary for us to have special times of prayer, and as to its being far better to have devotion diffused through our lives, and of how *laborare est orare*—to labour is to pray—all that is pernicious nonsense if it is meant to say that the incense will be fragrant and smoulder unless it is stirred up and renewed night and morning. There must be definite times of prayer if there is to be diffused devotion through the day. What would you think of people that said, 'Run your cars by electricity. Get it out of the wires; it will come! Never mind putting up any generating stations'? And not less foolish are they who seek for a devotion permeating life which is not often concentrated into definite and specific acts.

But the other side is as true. It is bad to clot your religion into lumps, and to leave the rest of the life without it. There must be the smouldering all day long. 'Rejoice evermore; pray without ceasing.' You can pray thus. Not set prayer, of course; but a reference to Him, a thought of Him, like some sweet melody, 'so sweet we know not we are listening to it,' may breathe its fragrance, and diffuse its warmth into the commonest and smallest of our daily activities. It was when Gideon was threshing wheat that the angel appeared to him. It was when Elisha was ploughing that the divine inspiration touched him. It was when the disciples were fishing that they saw the Form on the shore. And when we are in the way of our common life it is possible that the Lord may meet us, and that our souls may be aspiring to Him. Then work will be worship; then burdens will be lightened; then our lamps will burn; then the fruits of our daily lives will ripen; then our lives will be noble; then our spirits will rest as well as soar, and find fruition and aspiration perpetually alternating in stable succession of eternal progress.

RANSOM FOR SOULS—I.

'Then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul.'—EXODUS xxx. 12.

THIS remarkable provision had a religious intention. Connect it with the tax-money which Peter found in the fish's mouth.

I. Its meaning. Try to realise an Israelite's thoughts at the census. 'I am enrolled among the people and army of God: am I worthy? What am I, to serve so holy a God?' The payment was meant—

(*a*) To excite the sense of sin. This should be present in all approach to God, in all service; accompanying the recognition of our Christian standing. Our sense of sin is far too slight and weak; this defect is at the root of much feebleness in popular religion. The sense of sin must embrace not outward acts only, but inner spirit also.

(*b*) To suggest the possibility of expiation. It was 'ransom,' *i.e.* 'covering,' something paid that guilt might be taken away and sin regarded as non-existent. This is, of course, obviously, only a symbol. No tax could satisfy God for sin. The very smallness of the amount shows that it is symbolical only. 'Not with corruptible things as silver' is man redeemed.

II. Its identity for all. Rich or poor, high or low, all men are equal in sin. There are surface differences and degrees, but a deep identity beneath. So on the same principle all souls are of the same value. Here is the true democracy of Christianity. So there is one ransom for all, for the need of all is identical.

III. Its use. It was melted down for use in the sanctuary, so as to be a 'memorial' permanently present to God when His people met with Him. The greater portion was made into bases for the boards of the sanctuary. That is, God's dwelling with men and our communion with Him all rest on the basis of ransom. We are 'brought nigh by the blood of Christ.'

RANSOM FOR SOULS—II.

'The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel. . . .'—Exodus xxx. 15.

This tax was exacted on numbering the people. It was a very small amount, about fifteen pence, so it was clearly symbolical in its significance. Notice—

I. The broad principle of equality of all souls in the sight of God. Contrast the reign of caste and class in heathendom with the democracy of Judaism and of Christianity.

II. The universal sinfulness. Payment of the tax was a confession that all were alike in this: not that all were equally sinful, but all were sinful, whatever variations of degree might exist.

'There is no difference, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.'

III. The one ransom. It was a prophecy of which *we* know the meaning. Recall the incident of the 'stater' in the fish's mouth.

Christ declares His exemption from the tax. Yet He voluntarily comes under it, and He provides the payment of it for Himself and for Peter.

He does so by a miracle.

The Apostle has to 'take and give it'; so faith is called into exercise.

Thus there is but one Sacrifice for all; and the poorest can exercise faith and the richest can do no more. 'None other name.'

THE GOLDEN CALF

'And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. 2. And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. 3. And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. 4. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving-tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. 5. And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To-morrow is a feast to the Lord. 6. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play. 7. And the Lord said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves: 8. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. . . . 30. And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the Lord; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin. 31. And Moses returned unto the Lord, and said, Oh! this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. 32. Yet now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written. 33. And the Lord said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against Me, him will I blot out of My book. 34. Therefore now go, lead the people unto the place of which I have spoken unto thee. Behold, Mine Angel shall go before thee: nevertheless in the day when I visit I will visit their sin upon them. 35. And the Lord plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made.'—EXODUS xxxii. 1-8; 30-35.

IT was not yet six weeks since the people had sworn, 'All that the Lord hath spoken will we do, and be obedient.' The blood of the covenant, sprinkled on them, was scarcely dry when they flung off allegiance to Jehovah. Such short-lived loyalty to Him can never have been genuine. That mob of slaves was galvanised by Moses into obedience; and since their acceptance of Jehovah was in reality only yielding to the power of one strong will and its earnest faith, of course it collapsed as soon as Moses disappeared.

We have to note, first, the people's universal revolt. The language of verse 1 may easily hide to a careless reader the gravity and unanimity of the apostasy.

'The people gathered themselves together.' It was a national rebellion, a flood which swept away even some faithful, timid hearts. No voices ventured to protest. What were the elders, who shortly before 'saw the God of Israel,' doing to be passive at such a crisis? Was there no one to bid the fickle multitude look up to the summit overhead, where the red flames glowed, or to remind them of the hosts of Egypt lying stark and dead on the shore? Was Miriam cowed too, and her song forgotten?

We need not cast stones at these people; for we also have short memories for either the terrible or the gracious revelations of God in our own lives. But we may learn the lesson that God's lovers have to set themselves sometimes dead against the rush of popular feeling, and that there are times when silence or compliance is sin.

It would have been easy for the rebels to have ignored Aaron, and made gods for themselves. But they desired to involve him in their apostasy, and to get 'official sanction' for it. He had been left by Moses as his lieutenant, and so to get him implicated was to stamp the movement as a regular and entire revolt.

The demand 'to make gods' (or, more probably, 'a god') flew in the face of both the first and second commandments. For Jehovah, who had forbidden the forming of any image, was denied in the act of making it. To disobey Him was to cast Him off. The ground of the rebellion was the craving for a visible object of trust and a visible guide, as is seen by the reason assigned for the demand for an image. Moses was out of sight; they must have something to look at as their leader. Moses had disappeared, and, to these people who had only been heaved up to the height of believing in Jehovah by Moses, Jehovah had disappeared with him. They sank down again to the level of other races as soon as that strong lever ceased to lift their heavy apprehensions.

How ridiculous the assertion that they did not know what had become of Moses! They knew that he was up there with Jehovah. The elders could have told them that. The fire on the mount might have burned in on all minds the confirmation. Note, too, the black ingratitude and plain denial of Jehovah in 'the *man* that brought us up out of the land of Egypt.' They refuse to recognise God's part. It was Moses only who had done it; and now that he is gone they must have a visible god, like other nations.

Still sadder than their sense-bound wish is Aaron's compliance. He knew as well as we do what he should have said, but, like many another man in influential position, when beset by popular cries, he was frightened, and yielded when he should have 'set his face like a flint.' His compliance has in essentials been often repeated, especially by priests and ministers of religion who have lent their superior abilities or opportunities to carry out the wishes of the ignorant populace, and debased religion or watered down its prohibitions, to please and retain hold of them. The Church has incorporated much from heathenism. Roman Catholic missionaries have permitted 'converts' to keep their old usages. Protestant teachers have acquiesced in, and been content to find the brains to carry out, compromises between sense and soul, God's commands and men's inclinations.

We need not discuss the metallurgy of verse 4. But clearly Aaron asked for the earrings, not, as some would have it, hoping that vanity and covetousness would hinder their being given, but simply in order to get gold for the bad work which he was ready to do. The reason for making the thing in the shape of a calf is probably the Egyptian worship of Apis in that form, which would be familiar to the people.

We must note that it was the people who said, 'These be thy gods, O Israel!' Aaron seems to keep in the rear, as it were. He makes the calf, and hands it over, and leaves them to hail it and worship. Like all cowards, he thought that he was lessening his guilt by thus keeping in the background. Feeble natures are fond of such subterfuges, and deceive themselves by them; but they do not shift their sin off their shoulders.

Then he comes in again with an impotent attempt to diminish the gravity of the revolt. 'When he *saw* this,' he tried to turn the flood into another channel, and so proclaimed a 'feast to Jehovah'!—as if He could be worshipped by flagrant defiance of His commandments, or as if He had not been disavowed by the ascription to the calf, made that morning out of their own trinkets, of the deliverance from Egypt. A poor, inconsequential attempt to save appearances and hallow sin by writing God's name on it! The 'god' whom the Israelites worshipped under the image of a calf, was no less another 'god before Me,' though it was called by the name of Jehovah. If the people had their idol, it mattered nothing to them, and it mattered as little to Jehovah, what 'name' it bore. The wild orgies of the morrow were not the worship which He accepts.

What a contrast between the plain and the mountain! Below, the shameful feast, with its parody of sacrifice and its sequel of lust-inflamed dancing; above, the awful colloquy between the all-seeing righteous Judge and the intercessor! The people had cast off Jehovah, and Jehovah no more calls them 'My,' but '*thy* people.' They had ascribed their Exodus first to Moses, and next to the calf. Jehovah speaks of it as the work of Moses.

A terrible separation of Himself from them lies in '*thy* people, which *thou* broughtest up,' and Moses' bold rejoinder emphasises the relation and act which Jehovah seems to suppress (verse 11). Observe that the divine voice refuses to give any weight to Aaron's trick of compromise. These are no worshippers of Jehovah who are howling and dancing below there. They are 'worshipping *it*, and sacrificing to it,' not to Him. The cloaks of sin may partly cover its ugliness here, but they are transparent to His eyes, and many a piece of worship, which is said to be directed to Him, is, in His sight, rank idolatry.

We do not deal with the magnificent courage of Moses, his single-handed arresting of the wild rebellion, and the severe punishment by which he trampled out the fire. But we must keep his severity in mind if we would rightly judge his self-sacrificing devotion, and his self-sacrificing devotion if we would rightly judge his severity.

No words of ours can make more sublime his utter self-abandonment for the sake of the people among whom he had just been flaming in wrath, and smiting like a destroying angel. That was a great soul which had for its poles such justice and such love. The very words of his prayer, in their abruptness, witness to his deep emotion. 'If Thou wilt forgive their sin' stands as an incomplete sentence, left incomplete because the speaker is so profoundly moved. Sometimes broken words are the best witnesses of our earnestness. The alternative clause reaches the high-water mark of passionate love, ready to give up everything for the sake of its objects. The 'book of life' is often spoken of in Scripture, and it is an interesting study to bring together the places where the idea occurs (see Ps. lxix. 28; Dan. xii. 1; Phil. iv. 3; Rev. iii. 5). The allusion is to the citizens' roll (Ps. lxxxvii. 6). Those whose names are written there have the privileges of citizenship, and, as it is the 'book of life' (or '*of the living*'), life in the widest sense is secured to them. To blot out of it, therefore, is to cut a man off from fellowship in the city of God, and from participation in life.

Moses was so absorbed in his vocation that his life was less to him than the well-being of Israel. How far he saw into the darkness beyond the grave we cannot say; but, at least, he was content, and desirous to die on earth, if thereby Israel might continue to be God's people. And probably he had some gleam of light beyond, which enhanced the greatness of his offered sacrifice. To die, whatever loss of communion with God that involved here or hereafter, would be sweet if thereby he could purchase Israel's restoration to God's favour. We cannot but think of Paul willing to be separated from Christ for his brethren's sake.

We may well think of a greater than Moses or Paul, who did bear the loss which they were willing to bear, and died that sin might be forgiven. Moses was a true type of Christ in that act of supreme self-sacrifice; and all the heroism, the identification of himself with his people, the love which willingly accepts death, that makes his prayer one of the greatest deeds on the page of history, are repeated in infinitely sweeter, more heart-subduing fashion in the story of the Cross. Let us not omit duly to honour the servant; let us not neglect to honour and love infinitely more the Lord. 'This man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses.' Let us see that we render Him

'Thanks never ceasing,
And infinite love.'

THE SWIFT DECAY OF LOVE

'And Moses turned, and went down from the mount, and the two tables of the testimony were in his hand: the tables were written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other were they written. 16. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables. 17. And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said unto Moses, There is a noise of war in the camp. 18. And he said, It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome: but the noise of them that sing do I hear. 19. And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount. 20. And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it in the fire, and ground it to powder, and strawed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it. 21. And Moses said unto Aaron, What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them? 22. And Aaron said, Let not the anger of my lord wax hot: thou knowest the people, that they are set on mischief. 23. For they said unto me, Make us gods, which shall go before us: for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. 24. And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf. 25. And when Moses saw that the people were naked; (for Aaron had made them naked unto their shame among their enemies:) 26. Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him.'—EXODUS xxxii. 15-26.

MOSES and Joshua are on their way down from the mountain, the former carrying the tables in his hands and a heavier burden in his heart,—the thought of the people's swift apostasy. Joshua's soldierly ear interprets the shouts which are borne up to them as war-cries;

'He snuffeth the battle afar off, and saith Aha!' But Moses knew that they meant worse than war, and his knowledge helped his ear to distinguish a cadence and unison in the noise, unlike the confused mingling of the victors' yell of triumph and the shriek of the conquered. If we were dealing with fiction, we should admire the masterly dramatic instinct which lets the ear anticipate the eye, and so prepares us for the hideous sight that burst on these two at some turn in the rocky descent.

I. Note, then, what they saw. The vivid story puts it all in two words,—'the calf and the dancing.' There in the midst, perhaps on some pedestal, was the shameful copy of the Egyptian Apis; and whirling round it in mad circles, working themselves into frenzy by rapid motion and frantic shouts, were the people,—men and women, mingled in the licentious dance, who, six short weeks before, had sworn to the Covenant. Their bestial deity in the centre, and they compassing it with wild hymns, were a frightful contradiction of that grey altar and the twelve encircling stones which they had so lately reared, and which stood unregarded, a bowshot off, as a silent witness against them. Note the strange, irresistible fascination of idolatry. Clearly the personal influence of Moses was the only barrier against it. The people thought that he had disappeared, and, if so, Jehovah had disappeared with him. We wonder at their relapses into idolatry, but we forget that it was then universal, that Israel was at the beginning of its long training, that not even a divine revelation could produce harvest in seedtime, and that to look for a final and complete deliverance from the 'veil that was spread over all nations,' at this stage, is like expecting a newly reclaimed bit of the backwoods to grow grass as thick and velvety as has carpeted some lawn that has been mown and cared for for a century. Grave condemnation is the due of these short-memoried rebels, who set up their 'abomination' in sight of the fire on Sinai; but that should not prevent our recognising the evidence which their sin affords of the tremendous power of idolatry in that stage of the world's history. Israel's proneness to fall back to heathenism makes it certain that a supernatural revelation is needed to account for their possession of the loftier faith which was so far above them.

That howling, leaping crowd tells what sort of religion they would have 'evolved' if left to themselves. Where did 'Thou shalt have none other gods beside Me' come from? Note the confusion of thought, so difficult for us to understand, which characterises idolatry. What a hopelessly inconsequential cry that was, 'Make us gods, which shall go before us!' and what a muddle of contradictions it was that men should say 'These be thy gods,' though they knew that the thing was made yesterday out of their own earrings! It took more than a thousand years to teach the nation the force of the very self-evident argument, as it seems to us, 'the workman made it, therefore it is not God.' The theory that the idol is only a symbol is not the actual belief of idolaters. It is a product of the study, but the worshipper unites in his thought the irreconcilable beliefs that it was made and is divine. A goldsmith will make and sell a Madonna, and when it is put in the cathedral, will kneel before it.

Note what was the sin here. It is generally taken for granted that it was a breach of the second, not of the first, commandment, and Aaron's proclamation of 'a feast to the Lord' is taken as proving this. Aaron was probably trying to make an impossible compromise, and to find some salve for his conscience; but it does not follow that the people accepted the half-and-half suggestion. Leaders who try to control a movement which they disapprove, by seeming to accept it, play a dangerous game, and usually fail. But whether the people call the calf 'Jehovah' or 'Apis' matters very little. There would be as complete apostasy to another god, though the other god was called by the same name, if all that really makes his 'name' was left out, and foreign elements were brought in. Such worship as these wild dances, offered to an image, broke both the commandments, no matter by what name the image was invoked.

The roots of idolatry are in all men. The gross form of it is impossible to us; but the need for aid from sense, the dependence on art for wings to our devotion, which is a growing danger to-day, is only the modern form of the same dislike of a purely spiritual religion which sent these people dancing round their calf.

II. Mark Moses' blaze of wrath and courageous, prompt action. He dashes the tables on the rock, as if to break the record of the useless laws which the people have already broken, and, with his hands free, flings himself without pause into the midst of the excited mob. Verses 19 and 20 bear the impression of his rapid, decisive action in their succession of clauses, each tacked on to the preceding by a simple 'and' Stroke followed stroke. His fiery earnestness swept over all obstacles, the base riot ceased, the ashamed dancers slunk away. Some true hearts would gather about him, and carry out his commands; but he did the real work, and, single-handed, cowed and controlled the mob. No doubt, it took more time than the brief narrative, at first sight, would suggest. The image is flung into the fire from which it had come out. The fire made it, and the fire shall unmake it. We need not find difficulty in 'burning' a golden idol. That does not mean 'calcined,' and the writer is not guilty of a blunder, nor needed to be taught that you cannot burn gold. The next clause says that after it was 'burned,' it was still solid; so that, plainly, all that is meant is, that the metal was reduced to a shapeless lump. That would take some time. Then it was broken small; there were plenty of rocks to grind it up on. That would take some more time, but not a finger was lifted to prevent it. Then the more or less finely broken up fragments are flung into the brook, and, with grim irony, the people are bid to drink. 'You shall have enough of your idol, since you love him so. Here, down with him! You will have to take the consequences of your sin. You must drink as you have brewed.' It is at once a contemptuous demonstration of the idol's impotence, and a picture of the sure retribution.

But we may learn two things from this figure of the indignant lawgiver. One is, that the temper in which to regard idolatry is not one of equable indifference nor of scientific investigation, but that some heat of moral indignation is wholesome. We are all studying comparative mythology now, and getting much good from it; but we are in some danger of forgetting that these strange ideas and practices, which we examine at our ease, have spread spiritual darkness and moral infection over continents and through generations. Let us understand them, by all means; let us be thankful to find fragments of truth in, or innocent origins of, repulsive legends; but do not let the student swallow up the Christian in us, nor our minds lose their capacity of wholesome indignation at the systems, blended with Christ-like pity and effort for the victims.

We may learn, further, how strong a man is when he is all aflame with true zeal for God. The suddenness of Moses' reappearance, the very audacity of his act, the people's habit of obedience, all helped to carry him through the crisis; but the true secret of his swift victory was his own self-forgetting faith. There is contagion in pure religious enthusiasm. It is the strongest of all forces. One man, with God at his back, is always in the majority. He whose whole soul glows with the pure fire, will move among men like flame in stubble. 'All things are possible to him that believeth.' Consecrated daring, animated by love and fed with truth, is all-conquering.

III. Note the weaker nature of Aaron, taking refuge in a transparent lie. Probably his dialogue with his brother came in before the process described in the former verses was accomplished. But the narrative keeps all that referred to the destruction of the idol together, and goes by subject rather than by time. We do not learn how Moses had come to know Aaron's share in the sin, but his question is one of astonishment. Had they bewitched him anyhow? or what inducement had led him so far astray? The stronger and devouter soul cannot conceive how the weaker had yielded. Aaron's answer puts the people's wish forward. 'They said, Make us gods'; that was all which they had 'done.' A poor excuse, as Aaron feels even while he is stammering it out. What would Moses have answered if the people had 'said' so to him? Did he, standing there, with the heat of his struggle on him yet, look like a man that would acknowledge any demand of a mob as a reason for a ruler's compliance? It is the coward's plea. How many ecclesiastics and statesmen since then have had no better to offer for their acts! Such fear of the Lord as shrivelled before the breath of popular clamour could have had no deep roots. One of the first things to learn, whether we are in prominent or in private positions, is to hold by our religious convictions in supreme indifference to all surrounding voices, and to let no threats nor entreaties lead us to take one step beyond or against conscience.

Aaron feels the insufficiency of the plea, when he has to put it into plain words to such a listener, and so he flies to the resource of timid and weak natures, a lie. For what did he ask the gold, and put it into the furnace, unless he meant to make a god? Perhaps he had told the people the same story, as priests in all lands have been apt to claim a miraculous origin for idols. And he repeats it now, as if, were it true, he would plead the miracle as a vindication of the worship as well as his absolution. But the lie is too transparent to deserve even an answer, and Moses turns silently from him.

Aaron's was evidently the inferior nature, and was less deeply stamped with the print of heaven than his brother's. His feeble compliance is recorded as a beacon for all persons in places of influence or authority, warning them against self-interested or cowardly yielding to a popular demand, at the sacrifice of the purity of truth and the approval of their own consciences. He was not the last priest who has allowed the supposed wishes of the populace to shape his representations of God, and has knowingly dropped the standard of duty or sullied the clear brightness of truth in deference to the many-voiced monster.

IV. Note the rallying of true hearts round Moses. The Revised Version reads 'broken loose' instead of 'naked,' and the correction is valuable. It explains the necessity for the separation of those who yet remained bound by the restraints of God's law, and for the terrible retribution that followed. The rebellion had not been stamped out by the destruction of the calf; and though Moses' dash into their midst had cowed the rebels for a time, things had gone too far to settle down again at once. The camp was in insurrection. It was more than a riot, it was a revolution. With the rapid eye of genius, Moses sees the gravity of the crisis, and, with equally swift decisiveness, acts so as to meet it. He 'stood in the gate of the camp,' and made the nucleus for the still faithful. His summons puts the full seriousness of the moment clearly before the people. They have come to a fork in the road. They must be either for Jehovah or against Him. There can be no mixing up of the worship of Jehovah and the images of Egypt, no tampering with God's service in obedience to popular clamour. It must be one thing or other. This is no time for the family of 'Mr. Facing-both-ways'; the question for each man is, 'Under which King?' Moses' unhesitating confidence that he is God's soldier, and that to be at his side is to be on God's side, was warranted in him, but has often been repeated with less reason by eager contenders, as they believed themselves to be, for God. No doubt, it becomes us to be modest and cautious in calling all true friends of God to rank themselves with us. But where the issue is between foul wrong and plain right, between palpable idolatry, error, or unbridled lust, and truth, purity, and righteousness, the Christian combatant for these is entitled to send round the fiery cross, and proclaim a crusade in God's name. There will always be plenty of people with cold water to pour on enthusiasm. We should be all the better for a few more, who would venture to feel that they are fighting for God, and to summon all who love Him to come to their and His help.

Moses' own tribe responded to the summons. And, no doubt, Aaron was there too, galvanised into a nobler self by the courage and fervour of his brother, and, let us hope, urged by penitence, to efface the memory of his faithlessness by his heroism now.

We do not go on to the dreadful retribution, which must be regarded, not as massacre, but as legal execution. It is folly to apply to it, or to other analogous instances, the ideas of this Christian century. We need not be afraid to admit that there has been a development of morality. The retributions of a stern age were necessarily stern. But if we want to understand the heart of Moses, or of Moses' God, we must not look only at the ruler of a wild people trampling out a revolt at the sacrifice of many lives, but listen to him, as the next section of the narrative shows him, pleading with tears for the rebels, and offering even to let his own name be blotted out of God's book if their sin might be forgiven. So, coupling the two parts of his conduct together, we may learn a little more clearly a lesson, of which this age has much need,—the harmony of retributive justice and pitying love; and may come to understand that Moses learned both the one and the other by fellowship with the God in whom they both dwell in perfection and concord.

THE MEDIATOR'S THREEFOLD PRAYER

'And Moses said unto the Lord, See, Thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and Thou hast not let me know whom Thou wilt send with me. Yet Thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in My sight. 13. Now therefore, I pray Thee, if I have found grace in Thy sight, show me now Thy way, that I may know Thee, that I may find grace in Thy sight: and consider that this nation is Thy people. 14. And He said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. 15. And he said unto Him, If Thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence. 16. For wherein shall it be known here that I and Thy people have found grace in Thy sight? Is it not in that Thou goest with us? So shall we be separated, I and Thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth. 17. And the Lord said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken: for thou hast found grace in My sight, and I know thee by name. 18. And he said, I beseech Thee, show me Thy glory. 19. And He said, I will make all My goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy. 20. And he said, Thou canst not see My face: for there shall no man see Me, and live. 21. And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by Me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: 22. And it shall come to pass, while My glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with My hand while I pass by: 23. And I will take away Mine hand, and thou shalt see My back parts; but My face shall not be seen.'—EXODUS xxxiii. 12-23.

THE calf worship broke the bond between God and Israel. Instead of His presence, 'an angel' is to lead them, for His presence could only be destruction. Mourning spreads through the camp, in token of which all ornaments are laid aside. The fate of the nation is in suspense, and the people wait, in sad attire, till God knows 'what to do unto' them. The Tabernacle is carried beyond the precincts of the camp, in witness of the breach, and all the future is doubtful. The preceding context describes (vs. 7-11) not one event, but the standing order of these dark days, when the camp had to be left if God was to be found, and when Moses alone received tokens of God's friendship, and the people stood wistfully and tremblingly gazing from afar, while the cloudy pillar wavered down to the Tabernacle door. Duty brought Moses back from such communion; but Joshua did not need to come near the tents of the evil-doers, and, in the constancy of devout desire, made his home in the Tabernacle. In one of these interviews, so close and familiar, the wonderful dialogue here recorded occurred. It turns round three petitions, to each of which the Lord answers.

I. We have the leader's prayer for himself, with the over-abundant answer of God. In the former chapter, we had the very sublimity of intercession, in which the stern avenger of idolatry poured out his self-sacrificing love for the stiff-necked nation whom he had had to smite, and offered himself a victim for them. Here his first prayer is mainly for himself, but it is not therefore a selfish prayer. Rather he prays for gifts to himself, to fit him for his service to them. We may note separately the prayer, and the pleas on which it is urged. 'Show me now Thy way (or ways), that I may know Thee.' The desire immediately refers to the then condition of things. As we have pointed out, it was a time of suspense. In the strong metaphor of the context, God was making up His mind on His course, and Israel was waiting with hushed breath for the *dénouement*. It was not the entrance of the nation into the promised land which was in doubt, but the manner of their guidance, and the penalties of their idolatry. These things Moses asked to know, and especially, as verse 12 shows, to receive some more definite communication as to their leader than the vague 'an angel.' But the specific knowledge of God's 'way' was yearned for by him, mainly, as leading on to a deeper and fuller and more blessed knowledge of God Himself, and that again as leading to a fuller possession of God's favour, which, as already in some measure possessed, lay at the foundation of the whole prayer. The connection of thought here goes far beyond the mere immediate blessing, which Moses needed at the moment. That cry for insight into the purposes and methods of Him whom the soul trusts, amid darkness and suspense, is the true voice of sonship. The more deeply it sees into these, the more does the devout soul feel the contrast between the spot of light in which it lives and the encircling obscurity, and the more does it yearn for the further setting back of the boundaries. Prayer does more than effort, for satisfying that desire. Nor is it mere curiosity or the desire for intellectual clearness that moves the longing. For the end of knowing God's ways is, for the devout man, a deeper, more blessed knowledge of God Himself, who is best known in His deeds; and the highest, most blessed issue of the God-given knowledge of God, is the conscious sunshine of His favour shining ever on His servant. That is not a selfish religion which, beginning with the assurance that we have found grace in His sight, seeks to climb, by happy paths of growing knowledge of Him as manifested in His ways, to a consciousness of that favour which is made stable and profound by clear insight into the depths of His purposes and acts.

The pleas on which this prayer is urged are two: the suppliant's heavy tasks, and God's great assurances to him. He boldly reminds God of what He has set him to do, and claims that he should be furnished with what is needful for discharging his commission. How can he lead if he is kept in the dark? When we are as sure as Moses was of God's charge to us, we may be as bold as he in asking the needful equipment for it. God does not send His servants out to sow without seed, or to fight without a sword. His command is His pledge. He smiles approval when His servants' confidence assumes even bold forms, which sound like remonstrance and a suspicion that He was forgetting, for He discerns the underlying eagerness to do His will, and the trust in Him. The second plea is built on God's assurances of intimate and distinguishing knowledge and favour. He had said that He knew Moses 'by name,' by all these calls and familiar interviews which gave him the certainty of his individual relation to, and his special appointment from, the Lord. Such prerogative was inconsistent with reserve. The test of friendship is confidence. So pleads Moses, and God recognises the plea. 'I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth; but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.'

The plea based upon the relation of the people to God is subordinate in this first prayer. It is thrown in at the end almost as an afterthought; it boldly casts responsibility off Moses on to God, and does so to enforce the prayer that he should be equipped with all requisites for his work, as if he had said, 'It is more Thy concern than mine, that I should be able to lead them.' The divine answer is a promise to go not with the people, but with Moses. It is therefore not yet a full resolving of the doubtful matter, nor directly a reply to Moses' prayer. In one aspect it is less, and in another more, than had been asked. It seals to the man and to the leader the assurance that for himself he shall have the continual presence of God, in his soul and in his work, and that, in all the weary march, he will have rest, and will come to a fuller rest at its end. Thus God ever answers the true hearts that seek to know Him, and to be fitted for their tasks. Whether the precise form of desire be fulfilled or no, the issue of such bold and trustful pleading is always the inward certainty of God's face shining on us, and the experience of repose, deep and untroubled in the midst of toil, so that we may be at once pilgrims towards, and dwellers in, 'the house of the Lord.'

II. We have the intercessor's prayer for the people, with the answer (vs. 15-17). If the promise of verse 14 is taken as referring to the people, there is nothing additional asked in this second stage, and the words of verse 17, 'this thing also,' are inexplicable. Observe that 'with me' in verse 15 is a supplement, and that the 'us' of the next clause, as well as the whole cast of verse 16, suggests that we should rather supply 'with us.' The substance, then, of the second petition, is the extension of the promise, already given to Moses for himself, to the entire nation. Observe how he identifies himself with them, making them 'partakers' in his grace, and reiterating 'I and Thy people,' as if he would have no blessing which was not shared by them. He seeks that the withdrawal of God's presence, which had been the consequence of Israel's withdrawal from God, should be reversed, and that not he alone, but all the rebels, might still possess His presence.

The plea for this prayer is God's honour, which was concerned in making it plain even in the remote wilderness, to the wandering tribes there, that His hand was upon Israel. Moses expands the argument which he had just touched before. The thought of His own glory as the motive of God's acts, may easily be so put as to be repulsive; but at bottom it is the same as to say that His motive is love—for the glory which He seeks is the communication of true thoughts concerning His character, that men may be made glad and like Himself thereby. Moses has learned that God's heart must long to reveal its depth of mercy, and therefore he pleads that even sinful Israel should not be left by God, in order that some light from His face may strike into a dark world. There is wide benevolence, as well as deep insight into the desires of God, in the plea.

The divine answer yields unconditionally to the request, and rests the reason for so doing wholly on the relation between God and Moses. The plea which he had urged in lowly boldness as the foundation of both his prayers is endorsed, and, for his sake, the divine presence is again granted to the people.

Can we look at this scene without seeing in it the operation on a lower field of the same great principle of intercession, which reaches its unique example in Jesus Christ? It is not arbitrary forcing of the gospel into the history, but simply the recognition of the essence of the history, when we see in it a foreshadowing of our great High-priest. He, too, knits Himself so closely with us, both by the assumption of our manhood and by the identity of loving sympathy, that He accepts nothing from the Father's hand for Himself alone. He, too, presents Himself before God, and says 'I and Thy people.' The great seal of proof for the world that He is the beloved of God, lies in the divine guardianship and guidance of His servants. His prayer for them prevails, and the reason for its prevalence is God's delight in Him. The very sublime of self-sacrificing love was in the lawgiver, but the height of his love, measured against the immeasurable altitude of Christ's, is as a mole-hill to the Andes.

III. We have the last soaring desire which rises above the limits of the present. These three petitions teach the insatiableness, if we may use the word, of devout desires. Each request granted brings on a greater. 'The gift doth stretch itself as 'tis received.' Enjoyment increases capacity, and increase of capacity is increase of desire. God being infinite, and man capable of indefinite growth, neither the widening capacity nor the infinite supply can have limits. This is not the least of the blessings of a devout life, that the appetite grows with what it feeds on, and that, while there is always satisfaction, there is never satiety.

Moses' prayer sounds presumptuous, but it was heard unblamed, and granted in so far as possible. It was a venial error—if error it may be called—that a soul touched with the flame of divine love, should aspire beyond the possibilities of mortality. At all events, it was a fault in which he has had few imitators. *Our* desires keep but too well within the limits of the possible. The precise meaning of the petition must be left undetermined. Only this is clear, that it was something far beyond even that face-to-face intercourse which he had had, as well as beyond that vision granted to the elders. If we are to take 'glory' in its usual sense, it would mean the material symbol of God's presence, which shone at the heart of the pillar, and dwelt afterwards between the cherubim, but probably we must attach a loftier meaning to it here, and rather think of what we should call the uncreated and infinite divine essence. Only do not let us make Moses talk like a metaphysician or a theological professor. Rather we should hear in his cry the voice of a soul thrilled through and through with the astounding consciousness of God's favour, blessed with love-gifts in answered prayers, and yearning for more of that light which it feels to be life.

And if the petition be dark, the answer is yet more obscure 'with excess of light.' Mark how it begins with granting, not with refusing. It tells how much the loving desire has power to bring, before it speaks of what in it must be denied. There is infinite tenderness in that order of response. It speaks of a heart that does not love to say 'no,' and grants our wishes up to the very edge of the possible, and wraps the bitterness of any refusal in the sweet envelope of granted requests. A broad distinction is drawn between that in God which can be revealed, and that which cannot. The one is 'glory,' the other 'goodness,' corresponding, we might almost say, to the distinction between the 'moral' and the 'natural' attributes of God. But, whatever mysterious revelation under the guise of vision may be concealed in these words, and in the fulfilment of them in the next chapter, they belong to the 'things which it is impossible for a man to utter,' even if he has received them. We are on more intelligible ground in the next clause of the promise, the proclamation of 'the Name.' That expression is, in Scripture, always used as meaning the manifested character of God. It is a revelation addressed to the spirit, not to the sense. It is the translation, so far as it is capable of translation, of the vision which it accompanied; it is the treasure which Moses bore away from Sinai, and has shared among us all. The reason for his prayer was probably his desire to have his mediatorial office confirmed and perfected; and it was so, by that proclamation of the Name. The reason for this marvellous gift is next set forth as being God's own unconditional grace and mercy. He is His own motive, His own reason. Just as the independent and absolute fullness of His being is expressed by the name 'I am that I am,' so the independent and absolute freeness of His mercy, whether in granting Moses' prayer or in pardoning the people, is expressed by 'I will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy.' Not till all this exuberance of gracious answer has smoothed the way does the denial of the impossible request come; and even then it is so worded as to lay all the emphasis on what is granted, and to show that the refusal is but another phase of love. The impossibility of beholding the Face is reiterated, and then the careful provisions which God will make for the fulfilment of the possible part of the bold wish are minutely detailed. The distinction between the revealable and unrevealable, which has been already expressed by the contrast of 'glory' and 'grace,' now appears in the distinction between the 'face' which cannot be looked on, and the 'back' which may be.

Human language and thought are out of their depth here. We must be content to see a dim splendour shining through the cloudy words, to know that there was granted to one man a realisation of God's presence, and a revelation of His character, so far transcending ordinary experiences as that it was fitly called sight, but yet as far beneath the glory of His being as the comparatively imperfect knowledge of a man's form, when seen only from behind, is beneath that derived from looking him in the face.

But whatever was the singular prerogative of the lawgiver, as he gazed from the cleft of the rock at the receding glory, we see more than he ever did; and the Christian child, who looks upon the 'glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,' has a vision which outshines the flashing radiance that shone round Moses. It deepened his convictions, confirmed his faith, added to his assurance of his divine commission, but only added to his knowledge of God by the proclamation of the Name, and that Name is more fully proclaimed in our ears. Sinai, with all its thunders, is silent before Calvary. And he who has Jesus Christ to declare God's Name to him need not envy the lawgiver on the mountain, nor even the saints in heaven.

GOD PROCLAIMING HIS OWN NAME

'The Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.'—EXODUS xxxiv. 6.

THIS great event derives additional significance and grandeur from the place in which it stands. It follows the hideous act of idolatry in which the levity and sinfulness of Israel reached their climax. The trumpet of Sinai had hardly ceased to peal, and there in the rocky solitudes, in full view of the mount 'that burned with fire,' while the echoes of the thunder and the Voice still lingered, one might say, among the cliffs, that mob of abject cowards were bold enough to shake off their allegiance to God, and, forgetful of all the past, plunged into idolatry, and wallowed in sensuous delights. What a contrast between Moses on the mount and Aaron and the people in the plain! Then comes the wonderful story of the plague and of Moses' intercession, followed by the high request of Moses, so strange and yet so natural at such a time, for the vision of God's 'glory.' Into all the depths of that I do not need to plunge. Enough that he is told that his desire is beyond the possibilities of creatural life. The mediator and lawgiver cannot rise beyond the bounds of human limitations. But what *can* be *shall* be. God's 'goodness' will pass before him. Then comes this wonderful advance in the progress of divine revelation. If we remember the breach of the Covenant, and then turn to these words, considered as evoked by the people's sin, they become very remarkable. If we consider them as the answer to Moses' desire, they are no less so. Taking these two thoughts with us, let us consider them in—

I. The answer to the request for a sensuous manifestation.

The request is 'show me,' as if some visible manifestation were desired and expected, or, if not a visible, at least a direct perception of Jehovah's 'glory.' Moses desires that he, as mediator and lawgiver, may have some closer knowledge. The answer to his request is a word, the articulate proclamation of the 'Name' of the Lord. It is higher than all manifestation to sense, which was what Moses had asked. Here there is no symbol as of the Lord in the 'cloud.' The divine manifestation is impossible to sense, and that, too, not by reason of man's limitations, but by reason of God's nature. The manifestation to spirit in full immediate perception is impossible also. It has to be maintained that we know God only 'in part'; but it does not follow that our knowledge is only representative, or is not of Him 'as He is.' Though not whole it is real, so far as it goes.

But this is not the highest form. Words and propositions can never reveal so fully, nor with such certitude, as a personal revelation. But we have Christ's life, 'God manifest': not words about God, but the manifestation of the very divine nature itself in action. 'Merciful':—and we see Jesus going about 'doing good.' 'Gracious,' and we see Him welcoming to Himself all the weary, and ever bestowing of the treasures of His love. 'Longsuffering':—'Father! forgive them!' God is 'plenteous in mercy and in truth,' forgiving transgression and sin:—'Thy sins be forgiven thee.'

How different it all is when we have deeds, a human life, on which to base our belief! How much more certain, as well as coming closer to our hearts! Merely verbal statements need proof, they need warming. In Christ's showing us the Father they are changed as from a painting to a living being; they are brought out of the region of abstractions into the concrete.

> 'And so the word had breath, and wrought
> With human hands the creed of creeds.'

'Show us the Father and it sufficeth us.' 'He that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father.'

Is there any other form of manifestation possible? Yes; in heaven there will be a closer vision of Christ —not of God. Our knowledge of Christ will there be expanded, deepened, made more direct. We know not how. There will be bodily changes: 'Like unto the body of His glory,' etc. 'We shall be like Him.' 'Changed from glory to glory.'

II. The answer to the desire to see God's glory.

The 'Glory' was the technical name for the lustrous cloud that hung over the Mercy-seat, but here it probably means more generally some visible manifestation of the divine presence. What Moses craved to see with his eyes was the essential divine light. That vision he did not receive, but what he did receive was partly a visible manifestation, though not of the dazzling radiance which no human eye can see and live, and still more instructive and encouraging, the communication in words of that shining galaxy of attributes, 'the glories that compose Thy name.' In the name specially so-called, the name Jehovah, was revealed absolute eternal Being, and in the accompanying declaration of so-called 'attributes' were thrown into high relief the two qualities of merciful forgiveness and retributive justice. The 'attributes' which separate God from us, and in which vulgar thought finds the marks of divinity, are conspicuous by their absence. Nothing is said of omniscience, omnipresence, and the like, but forgiveness and justice, of both of which men carry analogues in themselves, are proclaimed by the very voice of God as those by which He desires that He should be chiefly conceived of by us.

The true 'glory of God' is His pardoning Love. That is the glowing heart of the divine brightness. If so, then the very heart of that heart of brightness, the very glory of the 'Glory of God,' is the Christ, in whom we behold that which was at once 'the glory as of the only begotten of the Father' and the 'Glory of the Father.'

In Jesus these two elements, pardoning love and retributive justice, wondrously meet, and the mystery of the possibility of their harmonious co-operation in the divine government is solved, and becomes the occasion for the rapturous gratitude of man and the wondering adoration of principalities and powers in heavenly places. Jesus has manifested the divine mercifulness; Jesus has borne the burden of sin and the weight of the divine Justice. The lips that said 'Be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee,' also cried, 'Why hast Thou forsaken Me?' The tenderest manifestation of the God 'plenteous in mercy . . . forgiving iniquity,' and the most awe-kindling manifestation of the God 'that will by no means clear the guilty,' are fused into one, when we 'behold that Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.'

III. The answer to a great sin.

This Revelation is the immediate issue of Israel's great apostasy.

Sin evokes His pardoning mercy. This insignificant speck in Creation has been the scene of the wonder of the Incarnation, not because its magnitude was great, but because its need was desperate. Men, because they are sinners, have been subjects of an experience more precious than the 'angels which excel in strength' and hearken 'to the voice of His word' have known or can know. The wilder the storm of human evil roars and rages, the deeper and louder is the voice that peals across the storm. So for us all Christ is the full and final revelation of God's grace. The last, because the perfect embodiment of it; the sole, because the sufficient manifestation of it. 'See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh.'

SIN AND FORGIVENESS

'. . . Forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty. . . .'—EXODUS xxxiv. 7.

THE former chapter tells us of the majesty of the divine revelation as it was made to Moses on 'the mount of God.' Let us notice that, whatever was the visible pomp of the external Theophany to the senses, the true revelation lay in the proclamation of the 'Name'; the revelation to the conscience and the heart; and such a revelation had never before fallen on mortal ears. It is remarkable that the very system which was emphatically one of law and retribution should have been thus heralded by a word which is perfectly 'evangelical' in its whole tone. That fact should have prevented many errors as to the relation of Judaism and Christianity. The very centre of the former was 'God is love,' 'merciful and gracious,' and if there follows the difficult addition 'visiting the iniquities,' etc., the New Testament adds its 'Amen' to that. True, the harmony of the two and the great revelation of the *means* of forgiveness lay far beyond the horizon of Moses and his people, but none the less was it the message of Judaism that 'there is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared.' The law spoke of retribution, justice, duty, and sin, but side by side with the law was another institution, the sacrificial worship, which proclaimed that God was full of love, and that the sinner was welcomed to His side. And it is the root of many errors to transfer New Testament language about the law to the whole Old Testament system. But, passing away from this, I wish to look at two points in these words.

I. The characteristics of human sins.

II. The divine treatment of them.

I. The characteristics of human sins.

Observe the threefold form of expression—iniquity and transgression and sin.

It seems natural that in the divine proclamation of His own holy character, the sinful nature of men should be characterised with all the fervid energy of such words; for the accumulation even of synonyms would serve a *moral* purpose, expressive at once of the divine displeasure against sin, and of the free full pardon for it in all its possible forms. But the words are very far from all meaning the same thing. They all designate the same actions, but from different points of view, and with reference to different phases and qualities of sin.

Now these three expressions are inadequately represented by the English translation.

'Iniquity' literally means 'twisting,' or 'something twisted,' and is thus the opposite of 'righteousness,' or rather of what is 'straight.' It is thus like our own 'right' and 'wrong,' or like the Latin 'in-iquity' (by which it is happily enough rendered in our version). So looking at this word and the thoughts which connect themselves with it, we come to this:—

(1) All sin of every sort is deviation from a standard to which we ought to be conformed.

Note the graphic force of the word as giving the straight line to which our conduct ought to run parallel, and the contrast between it and the wavering curves into which our lives meander, like the lines in a child's copy-book, or a rude attempt at drawing a circle at one sweep of the pencil. Herbert speaks of

> 'The crooked wandering ways in which we live.'

There is a path which is 'right' and one which is 'wrong,' whether we believe so or not.

There are hedges and limitations for us all. This law extends to the ordering of all things, whether great or small. If a line be absolutely straight, and we are running another parallel to it, the smallest possible wavering is fatal to our copy. And the smallest deflection, if produced, will run out into an ever-widening distance from the straight line.

There is nothing which it is more difficult to get into men's belief than the sinfulness of little sins; nothing more difficult to cure ourselves of than the habit of considering quantity rather than quality in moral questions. What a solemn thought it is, that of a great absolute law of right rising serene above us, embracing everything! And this is the first idea that is here in our text—a grave and deep one.

But the second of these expressions for sin literally means 'apostasy,' 'rebellion,' not 'transgression,' and this word brings in a more solemn thought yet, viz.:—

(2) Every sin is apostasy from or rebellion against God.

The former word dealt only with abstract thought of a 'law,' this with a 'Lawgiver.'

Our obligations are not merely to a law, but to Him who enacted it. So it becomes plain that the very centre of all sin is the shaking off of obedience to God. Living to 'self' is the inmost essence of every act of evil, and may be as virulently active in the smallest trifle as in the most awful crime.

How infinitely deeper and darker this makes sin to be!

When one thinks of our obligations and of our dependence, of God's love and care, what an 'evil and a bitter thing' every sin becomes!

Urge this terrible contrast of a loving Father and a disobedient child.

This idea brings out the ingratitude of all sin.

But the third word here used literally means 'missing an aim,' and so we come to

(3) Every sin misses the goal at which we should aim

There may be a double idea here—that of failing in the great purpose of our being, which is already partially included in the first of these three expressions, or that of missing the aim which we proposed to ourselves in the act. All sin is a failure.

By it we fall short of the loftiest purpose. Whatever we gain we lose more.

Every life which has sin in it is a 'failure.' You may be prosperous, brilliant, successful, but you are 'a failure.'

For consider what human life might be: full of God and full of joy. Consider what the 'fruits' of sin are. 'Apples of Sodom.' How sin leads to sorrow. This is an inevitable law. Sin fails to secure what it sought for. All 'wrong' is a mistake, a blunder. 'Thou fool!'

So this word suggests the futility of sin considered in its consequences. 'These be thy gods, O Israel!' 'The end of these things is death.'

II. The divine treatment of sins.

'Forgiving,' and yet not suffering them to go unpunished.

(1) God *forgives*, and yet He does not leave sin unpunished, for He will 'by no means *clear* the guilty.'

The one word refers to His love, His heart; the other to the retributions which are inseparable from the very course of nature.

Forgiveness is the flow of God's love to all, and the welcoming back to His favour of all who come. Forgiveness likewise includes the escape from the extreme and uttermost consequences of sin in this life and in the next, the sense of God's displeasure here, and the final separation from Him, which is eternal death. Forgiveness is not inconsistent with retribution. There must needs be retribution, from—

(*a*) The very constitution of our nature.

Conscience, our spiritual nature, our habits all demand it.

(*b*) The constitution of the world.

In it all things work under God, but only for 'good' to them who love God. To all others, sooner or later, the Nemesis comes. 'Ye shall eat of the fruit of your doings.'

(2) *God* forgives, and therefore He does not leave sin unpunished. It is divine mercy that strikes. The end of His chastisement is to separate us from our sins.

(3) Divine forgiveness and retributive justice both centre in the revelation of the Cross.

To us this message comes. It was the hidden heart of the Mosaic system. It was the revelation of Sinai. To Israel it was 'proclaimed' in thunder and darkness, and the way of forgiveness and the harmony of righteousness and mercy were veiled. To us it is proclaimed from Calvary. There in full light the Lord passes before us and proclaims, 'I am the Lord, the Lord God merciful and gracious.' 'Ye are come . . . unto Jesus.' 'See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh.' 'This is my Beloved Son, hear Him!'

BLESSED AND TRAGIC UNCONSCIOUSNESS

'. . . Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with Him.'—EXODUS xxxiv. 29.

'. . . And Samson wist not that the Lord had departed from him.'—JUDGES xvi. 20.

THE recurrence of the same phrase in two such opposite connections is very striking. Moses, fresh from the mountain of vision, where he had gazed on as much of the glory of God as was accessible to man, caught some gleam of the light which he adoringly beheld; and a strange radiance sat on his face, unseen by himself, but visible to all others. So, supreme beauty of character comes from beholding God and talking with Him; and the bearer of it is unconscious of it.

Samson, fresh from his coarse debauch, and shorn of the locks which he had vowed to keep, strides out into the air, and tries his former feats; but his strength has left him because the Lord has left him; and the Lord has left him because, in his fleshly animalism, he has left the Lord. Like, but most unlike, Moses, he knows not his weakness. So strength, like beauty, is dependent upon contact with God, and may ebb away when that is broken, and the man may be all unaware of his weakness till he tries his power, and ignominiously fails.

These two contrasted pictures, the one so mysteriously grand and the other so tragic, may well help to illustrate for us truths that should be burned into our minds and our memories.

I. Note, then, the first thought which they both teach us, that beauty and strength come from communion with God.

In both the cases with which we are dealing these were of a merely material sort. The light on Moses' face and the strength in Samson's arm were, at the highest, but types of something far higher and nobler than themselves. But still, the presence of the one and the departure of the other alike teach us the conditions on which we may possess both in nobler form, and the certainty of losing them if we lose hold of God.

Moses' experience teaches us that the loftiest beauty of character comes from communion with God. That is the use that the Apostle makes of this remarkable incident in 2 Cor. iii., where he takes the light that shone from Moses' face as being the symbol of the better lustre that gleams from all those who 'behold (or reflect) the glory of the Lord' with unveiled faces, and, by beholding, are 'changed into the likeness' of that on which they gaze with adoration and longing. The great law to which, almost exclusively, Christianity commits the perfecting of individual character is this: Look at Him till you become like Him, and in beholding, be changed. 'Tell me the company a man keeps, and I will tell you his character,' says the old proverb. And what is true on the lower levels of daily life, that most men become assimilated to the complexion of those around them, especially if they admire or love them, is the great principle whereby worship, which is desire and longing and admiration in the superlative degree, stamps the image of the worshipped upon the character of the worshipper. 'They followed after vanity, and have become vain,' says one of the prophets, gathering up into a sentence the whole philosophy of the degradation of humanity by reason of idolatry and the worship of false gods. 'They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.' The law works upwards as well as downwards, for whom we worship we declare to be infinitely good; whom we worship we long to be like; whom we worship we shall certainly imitate.

Thus, brethren, the practical, plain lesson that comes from this thought is simply this: If you want to be pure and good, noble and gentle, sweet and tender; if you desire to be delivered from your own weaknesses and selfish, sinful idiosyncrasies, the way to secure your desire is, 'Look unto Me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.' Contemplation, which is love and longing, is the parent of all effort that succeeds. Contemplation of God in Christ is the master-key that opens this door, and makes it possible for the lowliest and the foulest amongst us to cherish unpresumptuous hopes of 'being like Him' if we see Him as He is revealed here, and perfectly like Him when yonder we see Him 'as He *is*.'

There have been in the past, and there are to-day, thousands of simple souls, shut out by lowliness of position and other circumstances from all the refining and ennobling influences of which the world makes so much, who yet in character and bearing, ay, and sometimes in the very look of their meek faces, are living witnesses how mighty to transform a nature is the power of loving gazing upon Jesus Christ. All of us who have had much to do with Christians of the humbler classes know that. There is no influence to refine and beautify men like that of living near Jesus Christ, and walking in the light of that Beauty which is 'the effulgence of the divine glory and the express image of His Person.'

And in like manner as beauty so strength comes from communion with God and laying hold on Him. We can only think of Samson as a 'saint' in a very modified fashion, and present him as an example in a very limited degree. His dependence upon divine power was rude, and divorced from elevation of character and morality, but howsoever imperfect, fragmentary, and I might almost say to our more trained eyes, grotesque, it looks, yet there was a reality in it; and when the man was faithless to his vow, and allowed the crafty harlot's scissors to shear from his head the token of his consecration, it was because the reality of the consecration, rude and external as that consecration was, both in itself and in its consequences, had passed away from him.

And so we may learn the lesson, taught at once by the flashing face of the lawgiver and the enfeebled force of the hero, that the two poles of perfectness in humanity, so often divorced from one another—beauty and strength—have one common source, and depend for their loftiest position upon the same thing. God possesses both in supremest degree, being the Almighty and the All-fair; and we possess them in limited, but yet possibly progressive, measure, through dependence upon Him. The true force of character, and the true power for work, and every real strength which is not disguised weakness, 'a lath painted to look like iron,' come on condition of our keeping close by God. The Fountain is open for you all; see to it that you resort thither.

II. And now the second thought of my text is that the bearer of the radiance is unconscious of it.

'Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone.' In all regions of life, the consummate apex and crowning charm of excellence is unconsciousness of excellence. Whenever a man begins to imagine that he is good, he begins to be bad; and every virtue and beauty of character is robbed of some portion of its attractive fairness when the man who bears it knows, or fancies, that he possesses it. The charm of childhood is its perfect unconsciousness, and the man has to win back the child's heritage, and become 'as a little child,' if he would enter into and dwell in the 'Kingdom of Heaven.' And so in the loftiest region of all, that of the religious life, you may be sure that the more a man is like Christ, the less he knows it; and the better he is, the less he suspects it. The reasons why that is so, point, at the same time, to the ways by which we may attain to this blessed self-oblivion. So let me put just in a word or two some simple, practical thoughts.

Let us, then, try to lose ourselves in Jesus Christ. That way of self-oblivion is emancipation and blessedness and power. It is safe for us to leave all thoughts of our miserable selves behind us, if instead of them we have the thought of that great, sweet, dear Lord, filling mind and heart. A man walking on a tight-rope will be far more likely to fall, if he is looking at his toes, than if he is looking at the point to which he is going. If we fix our eyes on Jesus, then we can safely look, neither to our feet nor to the gulfs; but straight at Him gazing, we shall straight to Him advance. 'Looking off' from ourselves 'unto Jesus' is safe; looking off anywhere else is peril. Seek that self-oblivion which comes from self being swallowed up in the thought of the Lord.

And again, I would say, think constantly and longingly of the unattained. 'Brethren! I count not myself to have apprehended.' Endless aspiration and a stinging consciousness of present imperfection are the loftiest states of man here below. The beholders down in the valley, when they look up, may see our figures against the skyline, and fancy us at the summit, but our loftier elevation reveals untrodden heights beyond; and we have only risen so high in order to discern more clearly how much higher we have to rise. Dissatisfaction with the present is the condition of excellence in all pursuits of life, and in the Christian life even more eminently than in all others, because the goal to be attained is in its very nature infinite; and therefore ensures the blessed certainty of continual progress, accompanied here, indeed, with the sting and bite of a sense of imperfection, but one day to be only sweetness, as we think of how much there is yet to be won in addition to the perfection of the present.

So, dear friends, the best way to keep ourselves unconscious of present attainments is to set our faces forward, and to make 'all experience' as 'an arch wherethro' gleams that untravelled world to which we move.' 'Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone.'

The third practical suggestion that I would make is, cultivate a clear sense of your own imperfections. We do not need to try to learn our goodness. That will suggest itself to us only too clearly; but what we do need is to have a very clear sense of our shortcomings and failures, our faults of temper, our faults of desire, our faults in our relations to our fellows, and all the other evils that still buzz and sting and poison our blood. Has not the best of us enough of these to knock all the conceit out of us? A true man will never be so much ashamed of himself as when he is praised, for it will always send him to look into the deep places of his heart, and there will be a swarm of ugly, creeping things under the stones there, if he will only turn them up and look beneath. So let us lose ourselves in Christ, let us set our faces to the unattained future, let us clearly understand our own faults and sins.

III. Thirdly, the strong man made weak is unconscious of his weakness.

I do not mean here to touch at all upon the general thought that, by its very nature, all evil tends to make us insensitive to its presence. Conscience becomes dull by practice of sin and by neglect of conscience, until that which at first was as sensitive as the palm of a little child's hand becomes as if it were 'seared with a hot iron.' The foulness of the atmosphere of a crowded hall is not perceived by the people in it. It needs a man to come in from the outer air to detect it. We can accustom ourselves to any mephitic and poisonous atmosphere, and many of us live in one all our days, and do not know that there is any need of ventilation or that the air is not perfectly sweet. The 'deceitfulness' of sin is its great weapon.

But what I desire to point out is an even sadder thing than that—namely, that Christian people may lose their strength because they let go their hold upon God, and know nothing about it. Spiritual declension, all unconscious of its own existence, is the very history of hundreds of nominal Christians amongst us, and, I dare say, of some of us. The very fact that you do not suppose the statement to have the least application to yourself is perhaps the very sign that it does apply. When the lifeblood is pouring out of a man, he faints before he dies. The swoon of unconsciousness is the condition of some professing Christians. Frost-bitten limbs are quite comfortable, and only tingle when circulation is coming back. I remember a great elm-tree, the pride of an avenue in the south, that had spread its branches for more years than the oldest man could count, and stood, leafy and green. Not until a winter storm came one night and laid it low with a crash did anybody suspect what everybody saw in the morning—that the heart was eaten out of it, and nothing left but a shell of bark. Some Christian people are like that; they manage to grow leaves, and even some fruit, but when the storm comes they will go down, because the heart has been out of their religion for years. 'Samson wist not that the Lord was departed from him.'

And so, brother, because there are so many things that mask the ebbing away of a Christian life, and because our own self-love and habits come in to hide declension, let me earnestly exhort you and myself to watch ourselves very narrowly. Unconsciousness does not mean ignorant presumption or presumptuous ignorance. It is difficult to make an estimate of ourselves by poking into our own sentiments and supposed feelings and convictions, and the estimate is likely to be wrong. There is a better way than that. Two things tell what a man is—one, what he wants, and the other, what he does. As the will is, the man is. Where do the currents of your desires set? If you watch their flow, you may be pretty sure whether your religious life is an ebbing or a rising tide. The other way to ascertain what we are is rigidly to examine and judge what we do. 'Let us search and try our *ways*, and turn again to the Lord.' Actions are the true test of a man. Conduct is the best revelation of character, especially in regard to ourselves. So let us 'watch and be sober'—sober in our estimate of ourselves, and determined to find every lurking evil, and to drag it forth into the light.

Again, let me say, let us ask God to help us. 'Search me, O God! and try me.' We shall never rightly understand what we are, unless we spread ourselves out before Him and crave that Divine Spirit, who is 'the candle of the Lord,' to be carried ever in our hands into the secret recesses of our sinful hearts. 'Anoint thine eyes with eye salve that thou mayest see,' and get the eye salve by communion with God, who will supply thee a standard by which to try thy poor, stained, ragged righteousness. The *collyrium*, the eye salve, may be, will be, painful when it is rubbed into the lids, but it will clear the sight; and the first work of Him, whose dearest name is *Comforter*, is to convince of sin.

And, last of all, let us keep near to Jesus Christ, near enough to Him to feel His touch, to hear His voice, to see His face, and to carry down with us into the valley some radiance on our countenances which may tell even the world, that we have been up where the Light lives and reigns.

'Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eye salve, that thou mayest see.'

AN OLD SUBSCRIPTION LIST

'And they came, every one whose heart stirred him up, and every one whom his spirit made willing, and they brought the Lord's offering to the work. . . .'—EXODUS xxxv. 21.

THIS is the beginning of the catalogue of contributions towards the erection of the Tabernacle in the wilderness. It emphasises the purely spontaneous and voluntary character of the gifts. There was plenty of compulsory work, of statutory contribution, in the Old Testament system of worship. Sacrifices and tithes and other things were imperative, but the Tabernacle was constructed by means of undemanded offerings, and there were parts of the standing ritual which were left to the promptings of the worshipper's own spirit. There was always a door through which the impulses of devout hearts could come in, to animate what else would have become dead, mechanical compliance with prescribed obligations. That spontaneous surrender of precious things, not because a man must give them, but because he delights in letting his love come to the surface and find utterance in giving which is still more blessed than receiving, had but a narrow and subordinate sphere of action assigned to it in the legal system of the Old Covenant, but it fills the whole sphere of Christianity, and becomes the only kind of offering which corresponds to its genius and is acceptable to Christ. We may look, then, not merely at the words of our text, but at the whole section of which they form the introduction, and find large lessons for ourselves, not only in regard to the one form of Christian service which is pecuniary liberality, but in reference to all which we have to do for Jesus Christ, in the picture which it gives us of that eager crowd of willing givers, flocking to the presence of the lawgiver, with hands laden with gifts so various in kind and value, but all precious because freely and delightedly brought, and all needed for the structure of God's house.

I. We have set forth here the true motive of acceptable service.

'They came, every one whose heart stirred him up, and every one whom his spirit made willing.' There is a striking metaphor in that last word. Wherever the spirit is touched with the sweet influences of God's love, and loves and gives back again, that spirit is buoyant, lifted, raised above the low, flat levels where selfishness feeds fat and then rots. The spirit is raised by any great and unselfish emotion. There is buoyancy and glad consciousness of elevation in all the self-sacrifice of love, which dilates and lifts the spirit as the light gas smoothes out the limp folds of silk in a balloon, and sends it heavenwards, a full sphere. Only service or surrender, which is thus cheerful because it is the natural expression of love, is true service in God's sight. Whosoever, then, had his spirit raised and made buoyant by a great glad resolve to give up some precious thing for God's sanctuary, came with his gift in his hand, and he and it were accepted. That trusting of men's giving to spontaneous liberality was exceptional under the law. It is normal under the Gospel, and has filled the whole field, and driven out the other principle of statutory and constrained service and sacrifice altogether. We have its feeble beginnings in this incident. It is sovereign in Christ's Church. There are no pressed men on board Christ's ship. None but volunteers make up His army. 'Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy might.' He cares nothing for any service but such as it would be pain to keep back; nothing for any service which is not given with a smile of glad thankfulness that we are able to give it.

And for the true acceptableness of Christian service, that motive of thankful love must be actually present in each deed. It is not enough that we should determine on and begin a course of sacrifice or work under the influence of that great motive, unless we renew it at each step. We cannot hallow a row of actions in that wholesale fashion by baptizing the first of them with the cleansing waters of true consecration, while the rest are done from lower motives. Each deed must be sanctified by the presence of the true motive, if it is to be worthy of Christ's acceptance. But there is a constant tendency in all Christian work to slide off its only right foundation, and, having been begun 'in the spirit,' to be carried on 'in the flesh.' Constant watchfulness is needed to resist this tendency, which, if yielded to, destroys the worth and power, and changes the inmost nature, of apparently devoted and earnest service.

Not the least subtle and dangerous of these spurious motives which steal in surreptitiously to mar our work for Christ is habit. Service done from custom, and representing no present impulse of thankful devotion, may pass muster with us, but does it do so with God? No doubt a habit of godly service is, in some aspects, a good, and it is well to enlist that tremendous power of custom which sways so much of our lives, on the side of godliness. But it is not good, but, on the contrary, pure loss, when habit becomes mechanical, and, instead of making it easier to call up the true motive, excludes that motive, and makes it easy to do the deed without it. I am afraid that if such thoughts were applied as a sieve to sift the abundant so-called Christian work of the present day, there would be an alarming and, to the workers, astonishing quantity of refuse that would not pass the meshes.

Let us, then, try to bring every act of service nominally done for Christ into conscious relation with the motive which ought to be its parent; for only the work that is done because our spirits lift us up, and our hearts are willing, is work that is accepted by Him, and is blessed to us.

And how is that to be secured? How is that glad temper of spontaneous and cheerful consecration to be attained and maintained? I know of but one way. 'Brethren,' said the Apostle. when he was talking about a very little matter—some small collection for a handful of poor people—'ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, how that, though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we, through His poverty, might become rich.' Let us keep our eyes fixed upon that great pattern of and motive for surrender; and our hearts will become willing, touched with the fire that flamed in His. There is only one method of securing the gladness and spontaneousness of devotion and of service, and that is, living very near to Jesus Christ, and drinking in for ourselves, as the very wine that turns to blood and life in our veins, the spirit of that dear Master. Every one whose heart is lifted up will have it lifted up because it holds on by Him who hath ascended up, and who, being 'lifted up, draws all men to Him.' The secret of consecration is communion with Jesus Christ.

The appeal to lower motives is often tempting, but always a mistake. Continual contact with Jesus Christ, and realisation of what He has done for us, are sure to open the deep fountains of the heart, and to secure abundant streams. If we can tap these perennial reservoirs they will yield like artesian wells, and need no creaking machinery to pump a scanty and intermittent supply. We cannot trust this deepest motive too much, nor appeal to it too exclusively.

Let me remind you, too, that Christ's appeal to this motive leaves no loophole for selfishness or laziness. Responsibility is all the greater because we are left to assess ourselves. The blank form is sent to us, and He leaves it to our honour to fill it up. Do not tamper with the paper, for remember there is a Returning Officer that will examine your schedule, who knows all about your possessions. So, when He says, 'Give as you like; and I do not want anything that you do not like,' remember that 'Give as you like' ought to mean, 'Give as you, who have received everything from Me, are bound to give.'

II. We get here the measure of acceptable work.

We have a long catalogue, very interesting in many respects, of the various gifts that the people brought. Such sentences as these occur over and over again—'And every man with whom was found' so-and-so 'brought it'; 'And all the women did spin with their hands, and brought that which they had spun'; 'And the rulers brought' so-and-so. Such statements embody the very plain truism that what we have settles what we are bound to give. Or, to put it into grander words, capacity is the measure of duty. Our work is cut out for us by the faculties and opportunities that God has given us.

That is a very easy thing to say, but it is an uncommonly hard thing honestly to apply. For there are plenty of people that are smitten with very unusual humility whenever you begin to talk to them about work. 'It is not in my way,' 'I am not capable of that kind of service,' and so on, and so on. One would believe in the genuineness of the excuse more readily if there were anything about which such people said, 'Well, I *can* do that, at all events'; but such an all-round modesty, which is mostly observable when service is called for, is suspicious. It might be well for some of these retiring and idle Christians to remember the homely wisdom of 'You never know what you can do till you try.' On the other hand, there are many Christians who, for want of honest looking into their own power, for want of what I call sanctified originality, are content to run in the ruts that other people's vehicles have made, without asking themselves whether that is the gauge that their wheels are fit for. Both these sets of people flagrantly neglect the plain law that what we have settles what we should give.

The form as well as the measure of our service is determined thereby. 'She hath done what she could,' said Jesus Christ about Mary. We often read that, as if it were a kind of apology for a sentimental and useless gift, because it was the best that she could bestow. I do not hear that tone in the words at all. I hear, rather, this, that duty is settled by faculty, and that nobody else has any business to interfere with that which a Christian soul, all aflame with the love of God, finds to be the spontaneous and natural expression of its devotion to the Master. The words are the vindication of the form of loving service; but let us not forget that they are also a very stringent requirement as to its measure, if it is to please Christ. 'What she could'; the engine must be worked up to the last ounce of pressure that it will stand. All must be got out of it that can be got out of it. Is that the case about us? We talk about hard work for Christ. Have any of us ever worked up to the edge of our capacity? I am afraid that if the principles that lie in this catalogue were applied to us, whether about our gold and silver, or about our more precious spiritual and mental possessions, *we* could not say, 'Every man with whom was found' this, that, and the other, 'brought it for the work.'

III. Notice, again, how in this list of offerings there comes out the great thought of the infinite variety of forms of service and offering, which are all equally needful and equally acceptable.

The list begins with 'bracelets, and earrings, and rings, and tablets, all jewels of gold.' And then it goes on to 'blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and red skins of rams, and badgers' skins, and shittim wood.' And then we read that the 'women did spin with their hands, and brought that which they had spun—namely, the same things as have been already catalogued, 'the blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen' That looks as if the richer gave the raw material, and the women gave the labour. Poor women. they could not give, but they could spin. They had no stores, but they had ten fingers and a distaff, and if some neighbour found the stuff, the ten fingers joyfully set the distaff twirling, and spun the yarn for the weavers. Then there were others who willingly undertook the rougher work of spinning, not dainty thread for the rich soft stuffs whose colours were to glow in the sanctuary, but the coarse black goat's hair which was to be made into the heavy covering of the roof of the tabernacle. No doubt it was less pleasant labour than the other, but it got done by willing hands. And then, at the end of the whole enumeration, there comes, 'And the rulers brought precious stones, and spices, and oil,' and all the expensive things that were needed. The large subscriptions are at the bottom of the list, and the smaller ones are in the place of honour. All this just teaches us this—what a host of things of all degrees of preciousness in men's eyes go to make God's great building!

So various were the requirements of the work on hand. Each man's gift was needed, and each in its place was equally necessary. The jewels on the high-priest's breastplate were no more nor less essential than the wood that made some peg for a curtain, or than the cheap goat's-hair yarn that was woven into the coarse cloth flung over the roof of the Tabernacle to keep the wet out. All had equal consecration, because all made one whole. All was equally precious, if all was given with the same spirit. So there is room for all sorts of work in Christ's great house, where there are not only 'vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth,' and all 'unto honour . . . meet for the Master's use.' The smallest deed that co-operates to a great end is great. 'The more feeble are necessary.' Every one may find a corner where his special possession will work into the general design. If I have no jewels to give, I can perhaps find some shittim wood, or, if I cannot manage even that, I can at least spin some other person's yarn, even though I have only a distaff, and not a loom to weave it in. Many of us can do work only when associated with others, and can render best service by helping some more highly endowed. But all are needed, and welcomed, and honoured, and rewarded. The owner of all the slaves sets one to be a water-carrier, and another to be his steward. It is of little consequence whether the servant be Paul or Timothy, the Apostle or the Apostle's helper. 'He worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do,' said the former about the latter. All who are associated in the same service are on one level.

I remember once being in the treasury of a royal palace. There was a long gallery in which the Crown valuables were stored. In one compartment there was a great display of emeralds, and diamonds, and rubies, and I know not what, that had been looted from some Indian rajah or other. And in the next case there lay a common quill pen, and beside it a little bit of discoloured coarse serge. The pen had signed some important treaty, and the serge was a fragment of a flag that had been borne triumphant from a field where a nation's destinies had been sealed. The two together were worth a farthing at the outside, but they held their own among the jewels, because they spoke of brain-work and bloodshed in the service of the king. Many strangely conjoined things lie side by side in God's jewel-cases. Things which people vulgarly call large and valuable, and what people still more vulgarly call small and worthless, have a way of getting together there. For in that place the arrangement is not according to what the thing would fetch if it were sold, but what was the thought in the mind and the emotion in the heart which gave it. Jewels and camel's hair yarn and gold and silver are all massed together. Wood is wanted for the Temple quite as much as gold and silver and precious stones.

So, whatever we have, let us bring that; and whatever we are, let us bring that. If we be poor and our work small, and our natures limited, and our faculties confined, it does not matter. A man is accepted 'according to that he hath, and not according to that he hath not.' God does not ask how much we have given or done, if we have given or done what we could. But He does ask how much we have kept back, and takes strict account of the unsurrendered possessions, the unimproved opportunities, the unused powers. He gives much who gives all, though his all be little; he gives little who gives a part, though the part be much. The motive sanctifies the act, and the completeness of the consecration magnifies it. 'Great' and 'small' are not words for God's Kingdom, in which the standard is not quantity but quality, and quality is settled by the purity of the love which prompts the deed, and the consequent thoroughness of self-surrender which it expresses. Whoever serves God with a whole heart will render to Him a whole strength, and will thus bring Him the gifts which He most desires.

THE COPIES OF THINGS IN THE HEAVENS

'And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 2. On the first day of the first month shalt thou set up the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation. 3. And thou shalt put therein the ark of the testimony, and cover the ark with the vail. 4. And thou shalt bring in the table, and set in order the things that are to be set in order upon it; and thou shalt bring in the candlestick, and light the lamps thereof. 5. And thou shalt set the altar of gold for the incense before the ark of the testimony, and put the hanging of the door to the tabernacle. 6. And thou shalt set the altar of the burnt offering before the door of the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation. 7. And thou shalt set the laver between the tent of the congregation and the altar, and shalt put water therein. 8. And thou shalt set up the court round about, and hang up the hanging at the court gate. 9. And thou shalt take the anointing oil, and anoint the tabernacle, and all that is therein, and shalt hallow it, and all the vessels thereof: and it shall be holy. 10. And thou shalt anoint the altar of the burnt offering, and all his vessels, and sanctify the altar: and it shall be an altar most holy. 11. And thou shalt anoint the laver and his foot, and sanctify it. 12. And thou shalt bring Aaron and his sons unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and wash them with water. 13. And thou shalt put upon Aaron the holy garments, and anoint him, and sanctify him; that he may minister unto me in the priest's office. 14. And thou shalt bring his sons, and clothe them with coats: 15. And thou shalt anoint them, as thou didst anoint their father, that they may minister unto me in the priest's office; for their anointing shall surely be an everlasting priesthood throughout their generations. 16. Thus did Moses: according to all that the Lord commanded him, so did he.'—EXODUS xl. 1-16.

THE Exodus began on the night after the fourteenth day of the first month. The Tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month; that is, one year, less a fortnight, after the Exodus. Exodus xix. 1 shows that the march to Sinai took nearly three months; and if to this we add the eighty days of Moses' seclusion on the mountain, we get about six months as occupied in preparing the materials for the Tabernacle 'Setting it up' was a short process, done in a day. The time specified was ample to get ready a wooden framework of small dimensions, with some curtains and coverings of woven stuffs. What a glad stir there would be in the camp on that New Year's day, when the visible token of God's dwelling in its midst first stood there! Our present purpose is simply to try to bring out the meaning of the Tabernacle and its furniture. It was both a symbol and a type; that is, it expressed in material form certain great religious needs and truths; and, just because it did so, it pointed onwards to the full expression and satisfaction of these in Christ Jesus and His gifts. In other words, it was a parable of the requisites for, and the blessings of, communion with God.

Note, then, first, the general lesson of the Tabernacle as a whole. Its name declares its meaning, 'the tent of meeting' (Rev. Ver.). It was the meeting-place of God with man, as the name is explained in Exodus xxix. 42, 'where I will meet with you, to speak there unto thee.' It is also named simply 'the dwelling'; that is, of God. It was pitched in the midst of the camp, like the tent of the king with his subjects clustered round him. Other nations had temples, like the solemn structures of Egypt; but this slight, movable sanctuary was a new thing, and spoke of the continual presence of Israel's God, and of His loving condescension in sharing their wandering lives, and, like them, dwelling 'within curtains.' It was a visible representation of a spiritual fact for the then present; it was a parable of the inmost reality of communion between man and God; and it was, therefore, a prophecy both of the full realisation of His presence among men, in the temple of Christ's body, and of the yet future communion of Heaven, which is set before us by the 'great voice . . . saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men.'

The threefold division into court of the worshippers, holy place for the priests, and holiest of all, was not peculiar to the Tabernacle. It signifies the separation which, after all nearness, must still exist. God is unrevealed after all revelation; afar off, however near; shrouded in the utter darkness of the inmost shrine, and only approached by the priestly intercessor with the blood of the sacrifice. Like all the other arrangements of the Sanctuary, the division of its parts declares a permanent truth, which has impressed itself on the worship of all nations; and it reveals God's way of meeting the need by outward rites for the then present, and by the mediation of the great High-Priest in the time to come, whose death rent the veil, and whose life will, one day, make the holiest place in the heavens patent to our feet.

The enumeration of the furniture of the Tabernacle starts from the innermost shrine, and goes outward. It was fit that it should begin with God's special abode. The 'holy of holies' was a tiny chamber, closed in from light, the form, dimensions, materials, and furniture of which were all significant. It measured ten cubits, or fifteen feet, every way, thereby expressing, in its cubical form and in the predominance of the number ten, stability and completeness. It will be remembered that the same cubical form is given to the heavenly city, in the Apocalypse, for the same reason. There, in the thick darkness, unseen by mortals except for the one approach of the high-priest on the day of atonement, dwelt the 'glory' which made light in the darkness, and flashed on the gold which covered all things in the small shrine.

Our lesson does not speak of cherubim or mercy-seat, but specifies only the ark of the testimony. This was a small chest of acacia wood, overlaid with gold, and containing the two tables of the law, which were called the testimony, as bearing witness to Israel of God's will concerning their duty, and as therein bearing witness, too, of what He is. Nor must the other part of the witness-bearing of the law be left out of view,—that it testifies against the transgressors of itself. The ark was the centre-point of the divine revelation, the very throne of God; and it is profoundly significant that its sole contents should be the tables of stone. Egyptian arks contained symbols of their gods, degrading, bestial, and often impure; but the true revelation was a revelation, to the moral sense, of a Being who loves righteousness. Other faiths had their mysteries, whispered in the inmost shrine, which shunned the light of the outer courts; but here the revelation within the veil was the same as that spoken on the house-tops. Our lesson does not refer to the 'mercy seat,' which covered the ark above, and spoke the need for, and the provision of, a means whereby the witness of the law against the worshipper's sins should be, as it were, hid from the face of the enthroned God. The veil which is referred to in verse 3 was that which hung between the holy of holies and the holy place. It did not 'cover the ark,' as the Authorised Version unfortunately renders, but 'screened' it, as the Revised Version correctly gives it. It blazed with colour and embroidered figures of cherubim. No doubt, the colours were symbolical; but it is fancy, rather than interpretation, which seeks meanings beyond splendour in the blue and purple and crimson and white which were blended in its gorgeous folds. What is it which hangs, in ever-shifting hues, between man and God? The veil of creation, embroidered by

His own hand with beauty and life, which are symbolised in the cherubim, the types of the animate creation. The two divisions of the Tabernacle, thus separated by the veil, correspond to earth and heaven; and that application of the symbol is certainly intended, though not exclusively.

We step, then, from the mystery of the inner shrine out to the comparatively inferior sacredness of the 'holy place,' daily trodden by the priests. Three articles stand in it: the table for the so-called shew-bread, the great lampstand, and the golden altar of incense. Of these, the altar was in the midst, right in the path to the holiest place; and on the right, looking to the veil, the table of shew-bread; while on the left was the lampstand. These three pieces of furniture were intimately connected with each other, and represented various aspects of the spiritual character of true worshippers. The holy place was eminently the people's, just as the most holy place was eminently God's. True, only the priests entered it; but they did so on behalf of the nation. We may expect, therefore, to find special reference to the human side of worship in its equipments; and we do find it. Of the three articles, the altar of incense was in idea, as in locality, the centre; and we consider it first, though it stands last in our list, suggesting that, in coming from the most holy place, the other two would be first encountered. The full details of its construction and use are found in Exodus xxx. Twice a day sweet incense was burned on it, and no other kind of sacrifice was permitted; but once a year it was sprinkled, by the high priest, with expiatory blood. The meaning is obvious. The symbolism of incense as representing prayer is frequent in Scripture, and most natural. What could more beautifully express the upward aspirations of the soul, or the delight of God in these, than the incense sending up its wreaths of fragrant smoke? Incense gives no fragrance nor smoke till it is kindled; and the censer has to be constantly swung to keep up the glow, without which there will be no 'odour of a sweet smell.' So cold prayers are no prayers, but are scentless, and unapt to rise. The heart must be as a coal of fire, if the prayer is to come up before God with acceptance. Twice a day the incense was kindled; and all day long, no doubt, it smouldered, 'a perpetual incense before the Lord.' So, in the life of true communion, there should be daily seasons of special devotion, and a continual glow. The position of the altar of incense was right in the line between the altar of burnt offering, in the outer court, and the entrance to the holiest place; by which we are taught that acceptable prayer follows on reconciliation by sacrifice, and leads into 'the secret place of the Most High.' The yearly atonement for the altar taught that evil imperfection cleaves to all our devotion, which needs and receives the sprinkling of the blood of the great sacrifice.

The great seven-branched candlestick, or lampstand, stood on the right of the altar, as the priest looked to the most holy place. Its meaning is plain. It is an emblem of the Church as recipient and communicative of light, in all the applications of that metaphor, to a dark world. As the sacred lamps streamed out their hospitable rays into the desert all the night, so God's servants are lights in the world. The lamps burned with derived light, which had to be fed as well as kindled. So we are lighted by the touch of the great Aaron, and His gentle hand tends the smoking wick, and nourishes it to a flame. We need the oil of the Spirit to sustain the light. The lamp was a clustered light, representing in its metal oneness the formal and external unity of Israel. The New Testament unity is of a better kind. The seven candlesticks are made one because He walks in the midst, not because they are welded on to one stem.

Consistency of symbolism requires that the table of shew-bread should, like the altar and the candlestick, express some phase of true worship. Its interpretation is less obvious than that of the other two. The name means literally 'bread of the face'; that is, bread presented to, and ever lying before, God. There are two explanations of the meaning. One sees in the offering only a devout recognition of God as the author of material blessing, and a rendering to Him of His gifts of outward nourishment. In this case, the shew-bread would be anomalous, a literality thrust into the midst of symbolism. The other explanation keeps up the congruity, by taking the material bread, which is the result of God's blessing on man's toil, as a symbol of the spiritual results of God's blessing on man's spiritual toil, or, in other words, of practical righteousness or good works, and conceives that these are offered to God, by a strong metaphor, as acceptable food. It is a bold representation, but we may quote 'I will sup with him' as proof that it is not inadmissible; and it is not more bold than the declaration that our obedience is 'an odour of a sweet smell.' So the three pieces of furniture in the holy place spoke of the true Israel, when cleansed by sacrifice and in communion with God, as instant in prayer, continually raying out the light derived from Him, and zealous of good works, well-pleasing to God.

We pass outwards, through another veil, and stand in the court, which was always open to the people. There, before the door of the Tabernacle, was the altar of burnt offering. The order of our chapter brings us to it last, but the order of worship brought the worshipper to it first. Its distinctive character was that on it the blood of the slain sacrifices was offered. It was the place where sinful men could begin to meet with God, the foundation of all the communion of the inner sanctuary. We need not discuss mere details of form and the like. The great lesson taught by the altar and its place, is that reconciliation is needed, and is only possible by sacrifice. As a symbol it taught every Israelite what his own conscience, once awakened, endorsed, that sin must be expiated before the sinner and God can walk in concord. As prophecy, it assured those whose hearts were touched with longing, that God would Himself 'provide the lamb for the burnt offering,' in some way as yet unknown. For us it is an intended prefiguration of the great work of Jesus Christ. 'We have an altar.' We need that altar at the beginning of our fellowship with God, as much as Israel did. A Christianity which does not start from the altar of burnt offering will never get far into the holy place, nor ever reach that innermost shrine where the soul lives and adores, silent before the manifest God between the cherubim.

The laver, or basin, was intended for the priests' use, in washing hands and feet before ministering at the altar or entering the tabernacle. It teaches the necessity for purity, in order to priestly service.

Thus these three divisions of the Tabernacle and its court set forth the stages in the approach of the sou' to God, beginning with the reconciling sacrifice and cleansing water, advancing to closer communion by prayer, impartation of light received, and offering of good works to God, and so entering within the veil into secret sweetnesses of union with God, which attains its completeness only when we pass from the holy place on earth to the most holy in the heavens.

The remainder of the text can only be glanced at in a sentence or two. It consists of two parts: the consecration of the Tabernacle and its vessels by the anointing oil which, when applied to inanimate objects, simply devoted them to sacred uses, and the consecration of Aaron and his sons. A fuller account is given in Leviticus viii., from which we learn that it was postponed to a later period, and accompanied with a more elaborate ritual than that prescribed here. That consists of three parts: washing, as emblematic of communicated purity; robing, and anointing,—the last act signifying, when applied to men, their endowment with so much of the divine Spirit as fitted them for their theocratic functions. These three things made the 'sanctifying,' or setting apart for God's service, of Aaron and his sons. He is consecrated alone, in order that his primacy may be clearly indicated. He is consecrated by Moses as the higher; then the sons are consecrated with the same ceremonial, to indicate the hereditary priesthood, and the equality of Aaron's successors with himself. 'They truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death,' and provision for their brief tenure of office was embodied in the consecration of the sons by the side of the father. Their priesthood was only 'everlasting' by continual succession of short-lived holders of the office. But the prediction which closes the text has had a fulfilment beyond these fleeting, shadowy priests, in Him whose priesthood is 'everlasting' and 'throughout all generations,' because 'He ever liveth to make intercession' (Heb. vii. 25).

THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS

THE BURNT OFFERING A PICTURE AND A PROPHECY

'And the Lord called unto Moses, and spake unto him out of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying, 2. Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, If any man of you bring an offering unto the Lord, ye shall bring your offering of the cattle, even of the herd, and of the flock. 3. If his offering be a burnt-sacrifice of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own voluntary will, at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord. 4. And he shall put his hand upon the head of the burnt-offering; and it shall be accepted for him, to make atonement for him. 5. And he shall kill the bullock before the Lord; and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall bring the blood, and sprinkle the blood round about upon the altar that is by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. 6. And he shall flay the burnt offering, and cut it into his pieces. 7. And the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire upon the altar, and lay the wood in order upon the fire: 8. And the priests, Aaron's sons, shall lay the parts, the head, and the fat, in order upon the wood that is on the fire which is upon the altar: 9. But his inwards and his legs shall he wash in water; and the priest shall burn all on the altar, to be a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the Lord.'—Lev. i. 1-9.

In considering the Jewish sacrificial system, it is important to distinguish the symbolical from the typical value of the sacrifices. The former could scarcely be quite unnoticed by the offerers; but the latter was only gradually made plain, was probably never very generally seen, and is a great deal clearer to us, in the light of Christ, the Antitype, than it could ever have been before His coming. As symbols, the sacrifices expressed great eternal truths as to spiritual worship and communion, its hindrances, requisites, manner, and blessings. They were God's picture-book for these children in religious development. As types, they shadowed the work of Jesus Christ and its results.

The value of the sacrifices in either aspect is independent of modern questions as to their Mosaic origin;

for at whatever period the Priest's Code was promulgated, it equally bears witness to the ruling ideas of the offerings, and, in any case, it was long before Christ came, and therefore its prophecy of Him is as supernatural, whether Moses or Ezra were its author. I make this remark, not as implying that the new theory is not revolutionary, but simply as absolving a student of the religious significance of the sacrificial system from entering here on questions of date.

The 'burnt offering' stands first in Leviticus for several reasons. It was derived from patriarchal times; it was offered twice daily, besides frequently on other occasions; and in its significance it expressed the complete consecration which should be the habitual state of the true worshipper. Its name literally means 'that which ascends,' and refers, no doubt, to the ascent of the transformed substance of the sacrifice in fire and smoke, as to God. The central idea of this sacrifice, then, as gathered from its name and confirmed by its manner, is that of the yielding of the whole being in self-surrender, and borne up by the flame of intense consecration to God. Very beautiful is the variety of material which was permitted. The poor man's pair of pigeons went up with as sweet an odour as the rich man's young bull. God delights in the consecration to Him of ourselves and our powers, no matter whether they be great or small, if only the consecration be thorough, and the whole being be wrapped in the transforming blaze.

It is worth while to try to realise the strange and to our eyes repulsive spectacle of the burnt offering, which is veiled from us by its sacred associations. The worshipper leads up his animal by some rude halter, and possibly resisting, to the front of the Tabernacle the courts of which he dared not tread, but which was to him the dwelling-place of God. There by the altar he stands, and, first pressing his hand with force on the victim's head, he then, with one swift cut, kills it, and as the warm blood spouts from the mangled throat, the attendant priest catches it in a basin, and, standing at the two diagonally opposite corners of the altar in turn, dashes, with one dexterous twist, half of the contents against each, so as to wet two sides of the altar with one throw, and the other two with the other. The offerer then flays the reeking carcase, tossing the gory hide to the priest as his perquisite, and cuts up the sacrifice according to a fixed method. His part of the work is done, and he stands by with bloody hands while the priests arrange the pieces on the pile on the altar; and soon the odour of burning flesh and the thick smoke hanging over the altar tell that the rite is complete. What a scene it must have been when, as on some great occasions, hundreds of burnt offerings were offered in succession! The place and the attendants would look to us liker shambles and butchers than God's house and worshippers.

Now, if we inquire into the significance of the offering, it turns on two points—expiation and burning. The former it has in common with other bloody sacrifices, though it presents features of its own, even in regard to expiation. But the latter is peculiar to it, and must therefore be taken to be its special teaching. The stages in the whole process are five: the presentation, laying on of hands, slaughter, sprinkling of blood, and burning of the whole carcase. The first three are alike in this and other sacrifices, the fourth is modified here, and the last is found here only. Each has its lesson. The offerer has himself to bring the animal to the door of the Tabernacle, that he may show his willing surrender of a valuable thing. As he stands there with his offering, his thoughts would pass into the inner shrine, where God dwelt; and he would, if he were a true worshipper, feel that while God, on His part, already dwelt in the midst of the people, he, on the other hand, can only enter into the enjoyment of His presence by sacrifice. The offering was to be 'a male without blemish'; for bodily defect symbolising moral flaw could not be tolerated in the offerings to a holy God, who requires purity, and will not be put off with less than a man's best, be it ox or pigeon. 'The torn and the lame and the sick,' which Malachi charged his generation with bringing, are neither worthy of God to receive nor of us to offer.

When he pressed his hand on the head of the sacrifice, what was the worshipper meant to think? In all other instances where hands are laid on, some transference or communication of gifts or qualities is implied; and it is natural to suppose that the same meaning attaches to the act here, with such modifications as the case requires. We find that it was done in other bloody sacrifices, accompanied with confession. Nothing is said of confession here; but we cannot dismiss the idea that the offerer laid his sins on the victim by that striking act, especially as the very next clause says 'it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.' The atonement was made, as we shall see, by the application of the blood to the altar; but the possibility of the victim's blood atoning for the offerer depended on his having laid his hands on its head. We may perhaps go farther than 'transference of sins.' Might we not widen the expression, and say 'identification,' or, to use a word which has become so worn by religious controversy that it slips through our fingers unnoticed, 'substitution'? Did not the offerer say in effect, by that act, 'This is I? This animal life shall die, as I ought to die. It shall go up as a sweet savour to Jehovah, as my being should.'

The animal invested with this representative character is next to be slain by the offerer, not by the priest, who only performed that part of the ritual in the case of national or public sacrifices. That was distinctly a vicarious death; and, as inflicted by the hand of the person represented by the animal, he thereby acknowledged that its death was the wages of his sin, and allowed the justice of his condemnation, while he presented this innocent life—innocent because not that of a moral being—as his substitute. So far the worshipper's part goes. But now, when the act of expiation is to be symbolically represented, and, so far as outward sacrifice could, is to be accomplished, another actor appears. The priest comes forward as mediator between God and man, and applies the blood to the altar. The difference between the sprinkling of the blood, in the burnt offerings and in the other sacrifices, which had expiation for their principal object, in some of which it was smeared on the horns of the altar, and, in the most solemn of all, was carried into the holiest place, and sprinkled on the mercy-seat, suggests that the essential character of the burnt offering was not expiatory, though expiation was the foundation on which alone the essential character could be reared. The application of the blood was the formal act by which atonement was made. The word rendered 'to make atonement' means 'to cover'; and the idea conveyed is that the blood, which is the life of the sacrifice, covers the sins of the offerer, so as to make them powerless to dam back the love or to precipitate the wrath of God.

With this act the expiatory portion of the ritual ends, and we may here pause to look back for a moment on it as a whole. We have pointed out the double bearings of the Mosaic ritual as symbolical and as typical or prophetic. In the former aspect, the emphatic teaching of this rite is that 'the wages of sin is death,' that 'without shedding of blood there is no remission,' that God has appointed sacrifice as the means of entering into fellowship with Him, and that substitution and vicarious penalty are facts in His government. We may like or dislike these thoughts; we may call them gross, barbarous, immoral, and the like, but, at all events, we ought not to deny that they are ingrained in the Mosaic sacrificial system, which becomes unmeaning elaboration of empty and often repulsive ceremonies, if they are not recognised as its very centre. Of course, the meaning of the sacrifices was hidden from many a worshipper. They became opaque instead of transparent, and hid the great truth which they were meant to reveal. All forms labour under that disadvantage; but that they were significant in design, and largely so to devout hearts in effect, admits of no reasonable doubt. That which they signified was chiefly the putting away of sin by the sacrifice of innocent life, which stood in the place of the guilty. Of course, too, their benefit was symbolical, and the blood of bulls and goats could never put away sin; but, under the shelter of the outward forms, a more spiritual insight gradually grew up, such as breathes in many a psalm, and such as, we cannot doubt, filled the heart of many a worshipper, as he stood by the bleeding sacrifice on which his own hands had laid the burden that had weighed so heavy on himself. How far the prophetic aspect of the sacrifices was discerned, is a more difficult question. But this at least we know—that the highest level of evangelical prophecy, in Isaiah's wonderful fifty-third chapter, is reached from this vantage-ground. It is the flower of which these ordinances are the root. We need not enlarge upon the prophetic aspect of the sacrifice. The mere negative sinlessness of the victim points to the 'Lamb without blemish and without spot,' on whom, as Isaiah says, in language dyed through and through with sacrificial references, 'the Lord hath made to meet the iniquity of us all,' and who Himself makes 'His soul an offering for sin.' The modern tendency to bring down the sacrificial system to a late date surely sins against the sacred and all-explaining law of evolution, in the name of which it is attempted, inasmuch as it is an unheard-of thing for the earlier stages of a religion to be less clogged with ceremonial than the later. Psalmist and prophet first, and priest afterwards, is not the order of development.

The remaining part of the ritual was, as we have pointed out, peculiar to the burnt offering. In it alone the whole of the sacrifice was consumed on the altar, with the exceptions of the skin, which was given to the priest, and of the contents of the intestines. Hence it was sometimes called 'a whole burnt offering.' The meaning of this provision may be apprehended if we note that the word rendered 'burn,' in verse 9, is not that which simply implies destruction by fire, but is a peculiar word, reserved for sacrificial burnings, and meaning 'to cause to ascend in smoke or vapour.' The gross flesh was, as it were, refined into vapour and odour, and went up to God as 'a sweet savour.' It expressed, therefore, the transformation of the sinful human nature of the worshipper, by the refining power of the fire of God, into something more ethereal and kindred with the heaven to which it rose. Or, to put the thought in plainer words, on the basis of expiation, the glad surrender of the whole being is possible and will ensue; and when a man yields himself in joyful self-surrender to the God who has forgiven his sins, then the fire of the divine Spirit is shed abroad in his heart, and kindles a flame which lays hold on all the gross, earthly elements of his being, and changes them into fire, kindred with itself, which aspires, in ruddy tongues of upward-leaping light, to the God to whom the heart has been surrendered, and to whom the whole being tends.

This is the purpose of expiation; this is the summit of all religion. One man has realised to the full, in his life, what the burnt offering taught as the goal for all worshippers. Jesus has lived in the constant exercise of perfect self-surrender, and in the constant unmeasured possession of 'the Spirit of burning,' with which He has come to baptize us all. If we look to Him as our expiation, we should also find in Him the power to yield ourselves 'living sacrifices,' and draw from Him the sacred and refining fire, which shall transform our grossness into His likeness, and make even us 'acceptable to God, through Jesus Christ.'

STRANGE FIRE

'And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which He commanded them not. 2. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. 3. Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh Me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace. 4. And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said unto them, Come near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp. 5. So they went near, and carried them in their coats out of the camp; as Moses had said. 6. And Moses said unto Aaron, and unto Eleazar and unto Ithamar, his sons, Uncover not your heads, neither rend your clothes; lest ye die, and lest wrath come upon all the people: but let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the Lord hath kindled. 7. And ye shall not go out from the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: for the anointing oil of the Lord is upon you. And they did according to the word of Moses. 8. And the Lord spake unto Aaron, saying, 9. Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation, lest ye die: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations; 10. And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean; 11. And that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the Lord hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses.'—Lev. x. 1-11.

This solemn story of sin and punishment is connected with the preceding chapter by a simple 'and.' Probably, therefore, Nadab and Abihu 'offered strange fire,' immediately after the fire from Jehovah had consumed the appointed sacrifice. Their sin was aggravated by the time of its being committed. But a week had passed since the consecration of their father and themselves as priests. The first sacrifices had just been offered, and here, in the very blossoming time, came a vile canker. If such licence in setting aside the prescriptions of the newly established sacrificial order asserted itself then, to what lengths might it not run when the first impression of sanctity and of God's commandment had been worn by time and custom? The sin was further aggravated by the sinners being priests, who were doubly obliged to punctilious adherence to the instituted ritual. If they set the example of contempt, would not the people better (or, rather, worsen) their instruction?

Unquestionably, their punishment was awfully severe. But we shall entirely misconceive their sin if we judge it by our standards. We are not dependent on forms as Israel was, but the spiritual religion of Christianity was only made possible by the externalism of the older system. The sweet kernel would not have softened and become juicy without the shelter of the hard shell. Scaffolding is needed to erect a building; and he is not a wise man who either despises or would keep permanently standing the scaffold poles.

We draw a broad distinction between positive commandments and moral or religious obligations. But in the Mosaic legislation that distinction does not exist. There, all precepts are God's uttered will, and all disobedience is rebellion against Him. Nor could it be otherwise at the stage of development which Israel had reached.

What, then, was the crime of these two rash sons of Aaron? That involves two questions: What did they do? and What was the sin of doing it? The former question may be answered in various ways. Certainly the designation of 'strange fire' seems best explained by the usual supposition that it means fire not taken from the altar. The other explanations, which make the sin to have been offering at an unauthorised time, or offering incense not compounded according to the prescription, give an unnatural meaning to the phrase. It was the 'fire' which was wrong,—that is, it was 'fire which they had kindled,' caught up from some common culinary hearth, or created by themselves in some way.

What was their sin in thus offering it? Plainly, the narrative points to the essence of the crime in calling it 'fire which He had not commanded.' So this was their crime, that they were tampering with the appointed order which but a week before they had been consecrated to conserve and administer; that they were thus thrusting in self-will and personal caprice, as of equal authority with the divine commandment; that they were arrogating the right to cut and carve God's appointments, as the whim or excitement of the moment dictated; and that they were doing their best to obliterate the distinction on the preservation of which religion, morality, and the national existence depended; namely, the distinction between holy and common, clean and unclean. To plough that distinction deep into the national consciousness was no small part of the purpose of the law; and here were two of its appointed witnesses disregarding it, and flying in its face. The flash of holy fire consuming the sacrifices had scarcely faded off their eyeballs when they thus sinned.

They have had many successors, not only in Israel, while a ritual demanding punctilious conformity lasted, but in Christendom since. Alas! our censers are often flaming with 'strange fire.' How much so-called Christian worship glows with self-will or with partisan zeal! When we seek to worship God for what we can get, when we rush into His presence with hot, eager desires which we have not subordinated to His will, we are burning 'strange fire which He has not commanded.' The only fire which should kindle the incense in our censers, and send it up to heaven in fragrant wreaths, is fire caught from the altar of sacrifice. God must kindle the flame in our hearts if we are to render these else cold hearts to Him.

> 'The prayers I bring will then be sweet indeed
> If Thou the Spirit give, by which I pray.'

The swift, terrible punishment does indeed bear marks of the severity of that earlier stage of revelation. But it was not disproportioned to the offence, and it was not the cruelty of a martinet who avenged ceremonial lapses with penalties which should have been kept for moral offences. The surface of the sin was ceremonial impropriety: the heart of it was flouting Jehovah and His law. It was better that two men should die, and the whole nation perish not, as it would have done if their example had been followed. It is mercy to trample out the first sparks beside a powder-barrel.

There is a very striking parallel between verse 2 and the last verse of the preceding chapter. In both the same expression is used, 'There came forth fire from before the Lord, and consumed' (the word rendered *devoured* in verse 2 is the same in Hebrew as *consumed*). So, then, the same divine fire, which had graciously signified God's acceptance of the appointed sacrifice, now flashed out with lightning-like power of destruction, and killed the two rebel priests. There is dormant potency of destruction in the God who reveals Himself as gracious. The 'wrath of the Lamb' is as real as His gentleness. The Gospel is 'the savour of life unto life' and 'of death unto death.'

Moses' word to the stunned father is of a piece with the severity of the whole incident. No voice of condolence or sympathy comes from him. The brother is swallowed up in the lawgiver. He puts into words the meaning of the terrible stroke, and expects Aaron to acquiesce, though his heart bleeds. What was his interpretation? He saw in it God's purpose to be 'sanctified in them that come nigh Him.' The priests were these. Nadab and Abihu had been consecrated for the purpose of enforcing the truth of God's holiness. They had done the very opposite, by breaking down the distinction between sacred and common.

But their nearness to God brought with it not only corresponding obligations, but corresponding criminality and penalty, if these obligations were not discharged. If God is not 'sanctified' *by* His servants, He will sanctify Himself *on* them. If His people do not set forth His infinite separation from all evil and elevation above all creatures, He will proclaim these truths in lightning that kills and thunder that roars. It is a universal law which Moses sternly spoke to Aaron instead of comfort, bidding him recognise the necessity of the fearful blow to his paternal heart. 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.'

The prohibition to Aaron and his sons to show signs of mourning is as stern as the rest of the story, and serves to insist upon the true point of view from which to regard it. For the official representatives of the divine order of worship to mourn the deaths of its assailants would have seemed to indicate their murmuring at God's judgments, and might have led them to participate in the sin while they lamented its punishment. It is hard to mourn and not to repine. Affection blinds to the ill-desert of its objects. Nadab's and Abihu's stark corpses lying in the forecourt of the sanctuary, and Aaron's dry eyes and undisturbed attire, proclaim the same truths,—the gravity of the dead men's sin, and the righteous judgment of God. But the people might sorrow, for *their* mourning would help to imprint on them more deeply the lessons of the dread event.

While the victims' cousins carried their bodies to their graves in the sand, their father and brothers had to remain in the Tabernacle, because 'the anointing oil of Jehovah is upon you.' That oil, as the symbol of the Spirit, separates those on whom it is poured from all contact with death, from participation in sin, from the weight of sorrow. What have immortality, righteousness, joy in the Holy Ghost, to do with these dark shadows? Those whom God has called to His immediate service must hold themselves apart from earthly passions, and must control natural affection, if indulging it imperils their clear witness to God's righteous will.

The prohibition (verses 8-11) of wine and strong drink during the discharge of the priestly functions seems to suggest that Nadab and Abihu had committed their sin while in some degree intoxicated. Be that as it may, the prohibition is rested upon the necessity of preserving, in all its depth and breadth, the distinction between common and holy which Nadab and Abihu had broken down. That distinction was to be very present to the priest in his work, and how could he have the clearness of mind, the collectedness and composure, the sense of the sanctity of his office, and ministrations which it requires and gives, if he was under the influence of strong drink?

Nothing has more power to blur the sharpness of moral and religious insight than even a small amount of alcohol. God must be worshipped with clear brain and naturally beating heart. Not the fumes of wine, in which there lurks almost necessarily the tendency to 'excess,' but the being 'filled with the Spirit' supplies the only legitimate stimulus to devotion. Besides the personal reason for abstinence, there was another,—namely, that only so could the priests teach the people 'the statutes' of Jehovah. Lips stained from the wine-cup would not be fit to speak holy words. Words spoken by such would carry no power.

God's servants can never impress on the sluggish conscience of society their solemn messages from God, unless they are conspicuously free from self-indulgence, and show by their example the gulf, wide as between heaven and hell, which parts cleanness from uncleanness. Our lives must witness to the eternal distinction between good and evil, if we are to draw men to 'abhor that which is evil, and cleave to that which is good.'

THE FIRST STAGE IN THE LEPER'S CLEANSING

'And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 2. This shall be the law of the leper in the day of his cleansing: He shall be brought unto the priest: 3. And the priest shall go forth out of the camp; and the priest shall look, and, behold, if the plague of leprosy be healed in the leper; 4. Then shall the priest command to take for him that is to be cleansed two birds alive and clean, and cedar-wood, and scarlet, and hyssop: 5. And the priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over running water: 6. As for the living bird, he shall take it, and the cedar-wood, and the scarlet, and the hyssop, and shall dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the running water: 7. And he shall sprinkle upon him that is to be cleansed from the leprosy seven times, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird loose into the open field.'—Lev. xiv. 1-7.

The whole treatment of leprosy is parabolic. Leprosy itself is a 'parable of death.' The horrible loathsomeness, the contagiousness, the non-curableness, etc. So the man was shut out from camp and from sanctuary. There was a double process in the cleansing rite, restoring to each.

I. Sketch the ceremonial. Two birds, one slain over a vessel of water so that its blood drained in. Then the living bird was to be dipped into this water and blood, along with cedar, scarlet, and hyssop, and the man sprinkled seven times and the living bird set loose.

II. The significance. This elaborate symbolism was partly intelligible even then. Two birds, like the two goats on the Atonement Day. Did both in some sense symbolise the man? The first one was not exactly a sacrifice. Its death points to the physical death which was the end of the disease, but also in some sense its death symbolised the death by which cleansing was secured.

(*a*) The purifying water is made by blood added to it, *i.e.* cleansing by sacrifice.

'By water and by blood.'

(*b*) The sevenfold sprinkling. The cedar, symbol of incorruptibility; the scarlet, of full vital energy; the hyssop, of purifying. So the thought was suggested of the communication of cleansing, full health and incorruption, undecaying strength; all physical contrasts to leprosy sevenfold.

(*c*) The free, glad activity. The freed bird. The restored leper.

THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

'And the Lord spake unto Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron when they offered before the Lord, and died; 2. And the Lord said unto Moses, Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the vail before the mercy-seat, which is upon the ark; that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy-seat. 3. Thus shall Aaron come into the holy place; with a young bullock for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering. 4. He shall put on the holy linen coat, and he shall have the linen breeches upon his flesh, and shall be girded with a linen girdle, and with the linen mitre shall he be attired: these are holy garments; therefore shall he wash his flesh in water, and so put them on. 5. And he shall take of the congregation of the children of Israel two kids of the goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering. 6. And Aaron shall offer his bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and make an atonement for himself, and for his house. 7. And he shall take the two goats, and present them before the Lord at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. 8. And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the Lord, and the other lot for the scapegoat. 9. And Aaron shall bring the goat upon which the Lord's lot fell, and offer him for a sin offering: 10. But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the Lord, to make an atonement with Him, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness. 11. And Aaron shall bring the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself, and shall make an atonement for himself, and for his house, and shall kill the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself. 12. And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the Lord, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the vail: 13. And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the Lord, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy-seat that is upon the testimony, that he die not: 14. And he shall take of the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy-seat eastward; and before the mercy-seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times. 15. Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering, that is for the people, and bring his blood within the vail, and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock, and sprinkle it upon the mercy-seat, and before the mercy-seat. 16. And he shall make an atonement for the holy place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions in all their sins: and so shall he do for the tabernacle of the congregation, that remaineth among them in the midst of their uncleanness. 17. And there shall be no man in the tabernacle of the congregation when he goeth in to make an atonement in the holy place, until he come out, and have made an atonement for himself, and for his household, and for all the congregation of Israel. 18. And he shall go out unto the altar that is before the Lord, and make an atonement for it; and shall take of the blood of the bullock, and of the blood of the goat, and put it upon the horns of the altar round about. 19. And he shall sprinkle of the blood upon it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it, and hallow it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.'—Lev. xvi. 1-19.

The Talmudical treatise on the ritual of the day of atonement is entitled 'Yoma,' *the* day, which sufficiently expresses its importance in the series of sacrificial observances. It was the confession of the incompleteness of them all, a ceremonial proclamation that ceremonies do not avail to take away sin; and it was also a declaration that the true end of worship is not reached till the worshipper has free access to the holy place of the Most High. Thus the prophetic element is the very life-breath of this supreme institution of the old covenant, which therein acknowledges its own defects, and feeds the hopes of a future better thing. We do not here consider the singular part of the ritual of the Day of Atonement which is concerned with the treatment of the so-called 'scapegoat,' but confine ourselves to the consideration of that part of it which was observed in the Tabernacle and was intended to expiate the sins of the priesthood and of the people. The chapter connects the rites of the Day of Atonement with the tragic death of the sons of Aaron, which witnessed to the sanctity of the inner shrine, as not to be trodden but with the appointed offerings by the appointed priest; and so makes the whole a divinely given instruction as to the means by which, and the objects for which, Aaron may enter within the veil.

I. In verses 3-10 we have the preliminaries of the sacrifices and a summary of the rites. First, Aaron was to bathe, and then to robe himself in pure white.

The dress is in singular contrast to the splendour of his usual official costume, in which he stood before men as representing God, and evidently signifies the purity which alone fits for entrance into the awful presence. Thus vested, he brings the whole of the animals to be sacrificed to the altar,—namely, for himself and his order, a bullock and a ram; for the people, two goats and a ram. The goats are then taken by him to the door of the tent,—and it is to be observed that they are spoken of as both constituting one sin offering (v. 5). They therefore both belong to the Lord, and are, in some important sense, one, as was recognised by the later Rabbinical prescription that they should be alike in colour, size, and value. The appeal to the lot was an appeal to God to decide the parts they were respectively to sustain in a transaction which, in both parts, was really one. The consideration of the meaning of the ritual for the one which was led away may be postponed for the present. The preliminaries end with the casting of the lots, and in later times, with tying the ominous red fillet on the head of the dumb creature for which so weird a fate was in store.

II. The first part of the ritual proper (vs. 11-14) is the expiation for the sins of Aaron and the priesthood, and his entrance into the most holy place. The bullock was slain in the usual manner of the sin offering, but its blood was destined for a more solemn use. The white-robed priest took a censer of burning embers from the altar before the tent-door, and two hands full of incense, and, thus laden, passed into the Tabernacle. How the silent crowd in the outer court would watch the last flutter of the white robe as it was lost in the gloom within! He passed through the holy place, which, on every day but this, was the limit of his approach; but, on this one day, he lifted the curtain, and entered the dark chamber, where the glory flashed from the golden walls and rested above the ark. Would not his heart beat faster as he laid his hand on the heavy veil, and caught the first gleam of the calm light from the Shechinah? As soon as he entered, he was to cast the incense into the censer, that the fragrant cloud might cover the mercy-seat. Incense is the symbol of prayer, and that curling cloud is a picture of the truth that the purest of men, even the anointed priest, robed in white, who has offered sacrifices daily all the year round, and to-day has anxiously obeyed all the commands of ceremonial cleanliness, can yet only draw near to God as a suppliant, not entering there as having a right of access, but beseeching entrance as undeserved mercy. The incense did not cover 'the glory' that Aaron might not gaze upon it, but it covered him that Jehovah might not look on his sin. It would appear that, between verse 13 and verse 14, Aaron's leaving the most holy place to bring the blood of the sacrifice must be understood. If so, we can fancy the long-drawn sigh of relief with which the waiting worshippers saw him return, and carry back into the shrine the expiating blood. The 'most holy place' would still be filled and its atmosphere thick with the incense fumes when he returned to perform the solemn expiation for himself and the whole priestly order. Once the blood was sprinkled on the mercy-seat, and seven times, apparently, on the ground in front of it. The former act was intended, as seems probable, to make atonement for the sins of the priesthood; the latter, to cleanse the sanctuary from the ideal defilements arising from their defective and sinful ministrations.

This completed the part of the ceremonial which belonged immediately to Aaron and the priests. It carries important lessons. Could there be a more striking exhibition of their imperfect realisation of the idea of the priestly office? Observe the anomaly inherent in the very necessity of the case. Aaron was dressed in the white robes emblematic of purity; he had partaken in the benefit of, and had himself offered, sacrifices all the year round. So far as ritual could go, he was pure, and yet so stained with sin that he dared not enter into the divine presence without that double safeguard of the incense and the blood. The priest who cleanses others is himself unclean, and he and his fellows have tainted the sanctuary by the very services which were meant to atone and to purify. That solemn ritual is intended to teach priest and people alike, that every priest 'taken from among men' fails in his office, and pollutes the temple instead of purifying the worshipper. But the office was God's appointment, and therefore would not always be filled by men too small and sinful for its requirements. There must somewhere and somewhen be a priest who will be one indeed, fulfilling the divine ideal of the functions, and answering the deep human longings which have expressed themselves in all lands, for one, pure with no ceremonial but a real purity, to bring us to God and God to us, to offer sacrifice which shall need no after atonement to expiate its defects, and to stand without incense or blood of sprinkling for himself in the presence of God for us. The imperfections of the human holders of the Old Testament offices, whether priest, prophet, or king, were no less prophecies than their positive qualifications were. Therefore, when we see Aaron passing into the holy place, we see the dim shadow of Christ, who 'needeth not to make atonement' for His own sins, and is our priest 'for ever.'

III. The ritual for the atonement of the sins of the people follows. The two goats had been, during all this time, standing at the door of the Tabernacle. We have already pointed out that they are to be considered as one sacrifice. There are two of them, for the same reason, as has been often remarked, as there were two birds in the ritual of cleansing the leper; namely, because one animal could not represent the two parts of the one whole truth which they are meant to set forth. The one was sacrificed as a sin offering, and the other led away into a solitary land. Here we consider the meaning of the former only, which presents no difficulty. It is a sin offering for the people, exactly corresponding to that just offered for the priests. The same use is made of the blood, which is once sprinkled by Aaron on the mercy-seat and seven times on the ground before it, as in the former case. It is not, however, all employed there, but part of it is carried out into the other divisions of the Tabernacle; and first, the holy place, which the priests daily entered and which is called in verse 16 'the tent of meeting,' and next, the altar of burnt offering in the outer court, are in like manner sprinkled seven times with the blood, to 'hallow' them 'from the uncleanness of the children of Israel' (verse 19). The teaching of this rite, in its bearing upon the people, is similar to that of the previous priestly expiation. The insufficiency of sacrificial cleansing is set forth by this annual atonement for sins which had all been already atoned for. The defects of a ritual worship are proclaimed by the ritual which cleanses the holy places from the uncleanness contracted by them from the worshippers. If the altar, the seat of expiation, itself needed expiation, how imperfect its worth must be! If the cleansing fountain is foul, how shall it be cleansed, or how shall it cleanse the offerers? The bearing of the blood of expiation into the most holy place, where no Israelite ever entered, save the high priest, taught that the true expiation could only be effected by one who should pass into the presence of God, and leave the door wide open for all to enter. For surely the distance between the worshippers and the mercy-seat was a confession of imperfection; and the entrance there of the representative of the sinful people was the holding out of a dim hope that in some fashion, yet unknown, the veil would be rent, and true communion be possible for the humble soul. The Epistle to the Hebrews tells us where we are to look for the realities of which these ceremonies were the foreshadowings. The veil was rent at the crucifixion. Christ has gone into 'the secret place of the Most High,' and if we love Him, our hearts have gone with Him, and our lives are 'hid with Him, in God.'

'THE SCAPEGOAT'

'And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited. . . .'—LEV. xvi. 22.

THE import of the remarkable treatment of this goat does not depend on the interpretation of the obscure phrase rendered in the Authorised Version 'for the scapegoat.' Leaving that out of sight for the moment, we observe that the two animals were one sacrifice, and that the transaction with the living one was the completion of that with the slain. The sins of the congregation, which had been already expiated by the sacrifice, were laid by the high priest on the head of the goat, which was then sent away into the wilderness that he might 'bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited' (v. 22). Nothing depends on the fate of the goat, though, in after times, it was forced over a precipice and so killed. The carrying away of expiated sin, and not the destruction of unexpiated sinners, is the meaning of the impressive rite, and, had it been possible, the same goat that was sacrificed would have been sent into the desert. As that could not be done, an ideal unity was established between the two: the one sacrificed represented the fact of expiation, the one driven away represented the consequences of expiation in the complete removal of sin. The expiation was made 'within the veil'; but a visible token of its completeness was given to help feeble faith, in the blessed mystery of the unseen propitiation. What was divided in the symbol between the twin goats is all done by the one Sacrifice, who has entered into the holiest of all, at once Priest and Sacrifice, and with His own blood made expiation for sin, and has likewise carried away the sin of the world into a land of forgetfulness, whence it never can return.

The clear meaning of the rite is thus obtained, whatever be the force of the difficult phrase already referred to. 'Scapegoat' is certainly wrong. But it may be questioned whether the Revised Version is right in retaining the Hebrew word untranslated, and, by putting a capital letter to it, marking it as a proper name ('for Azazel'). The word occurs only here, so that we have no help from other passages. It seems to come from a root meaning 'to drive away,' and those who take it to be a proper name, generally suppose it to refer to some malignant spirit, or to Satan, and interpret it as meaning 'a fiend whom one drives away,' or, sometimes, 'who drives away.' The vindication of such an interpretation is supposed to lie in the necessity of finding a complete antithesis in the phrase to the 'for Jehovah' of the previous clause in verse 8. But it is surely sacrificing a good deal to rhetorical propriety to drag in an idea so foreign to the Pentateuch, and so opposed to the plain fact, that both goats were one sin offering (v. 5), in order to get a pedantically correct antithesis. In the absence of any guidance from usage, certainty as to the meaning of the word is unattainable. But there seems no reason, other than that of the said antithesis, against taking it to mean removal or dismissal, rather than 'a remover.' The Septuagint translates it in both ways: as a person in verse 8, and as 'sending away' in verse 10. If the latter meaning be adopted, then the word just defines the same purpose as is given more at length in verse 22, namely, the carrying away of the sins of the congregation. The logical imperfection of the opposition in verse 8 would then be simply enough solved by the fact that while both goats were 'for the Lord,' one was destined to be actually offered in sacrifice, and the other to be 'for dismissal.' The incomplete contrast testifies to the substantial unity of the two, and needs no introduction, into the most sacred rite of the old covenant, of a ceremony which looks liker demon-worship than a parable of the great expiation for a world's sins.

The question for us is, What spiritual ideas are contained in this Levitical symbolism? There is signified, surely, the condition of approach to God. Remember how the Israelites had impressed on their minds the awful sanctity of 'within the veil.' The inmost shrine was trodden once a year only by the high priest, and only after anxious lustrations and when clothed in pure garments, he entered 'with sacrifice and incense lest he die.' This ritual was for a gross and untutored age, but the men of that age were essentially like ourselves, and we have the same sins and spiritual necessities as they had.

The two goats are regarded as *one* sacrifice. They are a 'sin offering.' Hence, to show how unimportant and non-essential is the distinction between them, the 'lot' is employed; also, while the one is being slain, the other stands before the 'door of the Tabernacle.' This shows that both are parts of one whole, and it is only from the impossibility of presenting both halves of the truth to be symbolised in one that two are taken. The one which is slain represents the sacrifice for sin. The other represents the effects of that sacrifice. It is never heard of more. 'The Lamb of God taketh away the sins of the world.' 'As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us.'

I. The perfect removal of all sin is thus symbolised.

Notice (1) the vivid consciousness of sin which marked Judaism.

Was it exaggerated or right?

The same consciousness is part of all of us, but how overlaid! how stifled!

That consciousness once awakened has in it these elements—a bitter sense of sin as mine, involving guilt; despair as to whether I can ever overcome it; and fearful thoughts of my relation to God which conscience itself brings.

(2) The futility of all attempts to remove these fears.

False religions have next to nothing to say about forgiveness. Sacrifices and lustrations they have, but no assurance of absolution. Systems of philosophy and morals have nothing to say but that the universe goes crashing on, and if you have broken its laws you must suffer. That is all, or only the poor cheer of 'Well! you have fallen, get up and go on again!' So men often drug themselves into forgetfulness. They turn away from the unwelcome subject, and forget it at the price of all moral earnestness and often of all happiness; a lethargic sleep or a gaiety, as little real as that of the Girondins singing in their prison the night before being led out to the guillotine.

It is only God's authoritative revelation that can ensure the cure, only He can assure us of pardon, and of the removal of all barriers between ourselves and His love. Only His word can ensure, and His power can effect, the removal of the consequences of our sins. Only His word can ensure, and His power effect, the removal of the power of evil on our characters.

(3) Still the question, Can guilt ever be cancelled? often assumes a fearful significance.

Doubtless much seems to say that it cannot be.

(*a*) The irrevocableness of the past.

(*b*) The rigid law of consequences in this world.

(*c*) The indissoluble unity of an individual life and moral nature, confirmed by the experience of failure in all attempts at reformation of self.

(*d*) The consciousness of disturbed relations with God, and the prophecy of judgment. All this that ancient symbol suggested. The picture of the goat going away, and away, and away, a lessening speck on the horizon, and never heard of more is the divine symbol of the great fact that there is full, free, everlasting forgiveness, and on God's part, utter forgetfulness. 'Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow.' 'I will remember them no more at all for ever.'

II. The bearing away of sin is indissolubly connected with sacrifice. Two goats were provided, of which one was offered for a sin offering, indicating that sacrifice came first; then the removal of sin was symbolised by the sending away of the second goat. There is an evident reference to this sequence in the words 'without shedding of blood there is no remission.' The two goats represent Christ's work; the one in its essence, the other in its effect.

The one teaches that sacrifice is a necessary condition of pardon. Forgiveness was not given because the offerer confessed his guilt or because 'God was merciful,' but because the goat had been slain as a sin offering. There is deep spiritual truth for us in this symbolism. We do not need to enter on the philosophy of atonement, but simply to rest on the fact—that the only authority on which we can be sure of forgiveness at all indissolubly associates the two things, sacrifice and pardon. We have no reason to believe in forgiveness except from the Bible record and assurance.

Was the Mosaic ritual a divinely appointed thing? If so, its testimony is conclusive. But even if it were only the embodiment of human aspirations and wants, it would be a strong evidence of the necessity of some such thing as forgiveness.

The shallow dream that God's forgiveness can be extended without a sacrifice having been offered does not exalt but detracts from the divine character. It invariably leads to an emasculated abhorrence of evil, and detracts from the holiness of God, as well as introduces low thoughts of the greatness of forgiveness and of the infinite love of God.

III. The bearing away of sin is associated with man's laying of his sins on the sacrifice appointed by God.

We have seen that the two goats must be regarded as together making one whole. The one which was slain made 'atonement . . . because of the uncleannesses of the children of Israel, and because of their transgressions, even all their sins,' but that expiation was not actually effective till Aaron had 'laid his hands on the head of the live goat, and confessed over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, . . . and put them on the head of the live goat, and sent him away into the wilderness.' The sacrifice of the slain goat did not accomplish the pardon or removal of the people's sins, but made it possible that their sins should be pardoned and removed.

Then the method by which that possibility is realised is the laying hands on the scapegoat and confessing the sins upon it. The sins which are actually forgiven, by virtue of the atonement made for all sins, are those which it bears away to the wilderness.

This answers, point for point, to repentance and faith. By these the possibility is turned into an actuality for as many as believe on Christ.

Christ has died for sin. Christ has made atonement by which all sin may be forgiven; whether any shall actually be forgiven depends on something else. It is conceivable that though Christ died, no sin might be pardoned, if no man believed. His blood would not, even then, have been shed in vain, for the purpose of it would have been fully effected in providing a way by which any and all sin could be forgiven. So that the whole question whether any man's sin is pardoned turns on this, Has he laid his hand on Christ? Faith is only a condition of forgiveness, not a cause, or in itself a power. There was no healing in the mere laying of the hand on the head of the goat.

It was not faith which was the reason for forgiveness, but God's love which had provided the sacrifice.

God's will is not a bare will to pardon, nor a bare will to pardon for Christ's sake, but for Christ's sake to pardon them who believe. 'Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world.' 'Dost thou believe on the Son of God?' 'Through this Man is preached the remission of sins.'

THE CONSECRATION OF JOY

'And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 34. Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, The fifteenth day of this seventh month shall be the feast of tabernacles for seven days unto the Lord. 35. On the first day shall be an holy convocation: ye shall do no servile work therein. 36. Seven days ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord: on the eighth day shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord: it is a solemn assembly; and ye shall do no servile work therein. 37. These are the feasts of the Lord, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, to offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord, a burnt offering, and a meat offering, a sacrifice, and drink offerings, every thing upon his day: 38. Beside the sabbaths of the Lord, and beside your gifts, and beside all your vows, and beside all your freewill offerings, which ye give unto the Lord. 39. Also in the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when ye have gathered in the fruit of the land, ye shall keep a feast unto the Lord seven days: on the first day shall be a sabbath, and on the eighth day shall be a sabbath. 40. And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm-trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days. 41. And ye shall keep it a feast unto the Lord seven days in the year. It shall be a statute for ever in your generations: ye shall celebrate it in the seventh month. 42. Ye shall dwell in booths seven days; all that are Israelites born shall dwell in booths: 43. That your generations may know that I made the children of Israel to dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. 44. And Moses declared unto the children of Israel the feasts of the Lord.'—LEV. xxiii. 33-44.

THESE directions for the observance of the great festival at the close of harvest are singularly arranged.

Verses 33-36 give part of the instructions for the Feast, verses 37 and 38 interrupt these with a summary of the contents of the chapter, and verses 39 to the end pick up the broken thread, and finish the regulations for the feast. Naturally, this apparent afterthought has been pointed out as clear evidence of diversity of authorship. But a reasonable explanation may be given on the hypothesis of the unity of the section, by observing that verses 33-36 deal only with the sacrificial side of the feast, as worship proper, and thus come into line with the previous part of the chapter, which is occupied with an enumeration of the annual 'feasts of the Lord' (v. 4). It was natural, therefore, that, when the list had been completed by the sacrificial prescriptions for the last of the series, the close of the catalogue should be marked, in verses 37, 38, and that then the other parts of the observances connected with this feast, which are not sacrificial, nor, properly speaking, worship, should be added. There is no need to invoke the supposition of two authors, and a subsequent stitching together, in order to explain the arrangement. The unity is all the more probable because, otherwise, the first half would give the name of the feast as that of 'tabernacles,' and would not contain a word to account for the name.

We need not, then, include the separating wedge, in verses 37, 38, in our present consideration. The ritual of the feast is broadly divided by it, and we may consider the two portions separately. The first half prescribes the duration of the feast as seven days (the perfect number). with an eighth, which is named, like the first, 'an holy convocation,' on which no work was to be done, but is also called 'a solemn assembly,' or rather, as the Revised Version reads, in margin, 'a closing festival,' inasmuch as it closed, not only that particular feast, but the whole series for the year. The observances enjoined, then, are the public assembly on the first and eighth days, with cessation from labour, and a daily offering. We learn more about the offering from Numbers xxix. 12 *et seq.*, which appoints a very peculiar arrangement. On each day there was to be, as on other feast days, one goat for a sin offering; but the number of rams and lambs for the burnt offering was doubled, and, during the seven days of the feast, seventy bullocks were offered, arranged in a singular diminishing scale,—thirteen on the first day, and falling off by one a day till the seventh day, when seven were sacrificed. The eighth day was marked as no part of the feast proper, by the number of sacrifices offered on it, dropping to one bullock, one ram, and seven lambs. No satisfactory account of this regulation has been suggested. It may possibly have meant no more than to mark the first day as the chief, and to let the worshippers down gradually from the extraordinary to the ordinary.

The other half of the regulations deals with the more domestic aspect of the festival. Observe, as significant of the different point of view taken in it, that the first and eighth days are there described not as 'holy convocations,' but as 'sabbaths,' or, as the Revised Version gives it better, 'a solemn rest.' Observe, also, that these verses connect the feast with the ingathering of the harvest, as does Exodus xxiii. 16. It is quite possible that Moses grafted the more commemorative aspect of the feast on an older 'harvest home'; but that is purely conjectural, however confidently affirmed as certain. To tumble down cartloads of quotations about all sorts of nations that ran up booths and feasted in them at vintage-time does not help us much. The 'joy of harvest' was unquestionably blended with the joy of remembered national deliverance, but that the latter idea was superadded to the former at a later time is, to say the least, not proven. Would it matter very much if it were? Three kinds of trees are specified from which 'the fruit,' that is branches with fruit on them, if the tree bore fruit, were to be taken: palms, 'thick trees,' that is thick foliaged, which could give leafy shade, and willows of the brook, which the Rabbis say were used for binding the others together. Verse 40 does not tell what is to be done with these branches, but the later usage was to carry some of them in the hand as well as to use them for booths. The keynote of the whole feast is struck in verse 40: 'Ye shall rejoice before the Lord your God.' The leafy spoils come into view here as tokens of jubilation, which certainly suggests their being borne in the hand; but they were also meant to be used in building the booths in which the whole nation was to live during the seven days, in commemoration of God's having made them 'dwell in booths, when I brought them out of the land of Egypt.' This is all that is enjoined by Moses. Later additions to the ceremonial do not concern us here, however interesting some of these are. The true intention of the feast is best learned from the original simple form.

What, then, was its intention? It was the commemoration of the wilderness life as the ground of rejoicing 'before the Lord.' But we must not forget that, according to Leviticus, it was appointed while the wilderness life was still present, and so was not to be observed then. Was it. then, a dead letter, or had the appointment a message of joy even to the weary wanderers who lived in the veritable booths, which after generations were to make a feast of mimicking? How firm the confidence of entering the land must have been, which promulgated such a law! It would tend to hearten the fainting courage of the pilgrims. A divinely guaranteed future is as certain as the past, and the wanderers whom He guides may be sure of coming to the settled home. All words which He speaks beforehand concerning that rest and the joyful worship there are pledges that it shall one day be theirs. The present use of the prospective law was to feed faith and hearten hope; and, when Canaan was reached, its use was to feed memory and brighten godly gladness.

The feast of tabernacles was the consecration of joy. Other religions have had their festivals, in which wild tumult and foul orgies have debased the worshippers to the level of their gods. How different the pure gladness of this feast 'before the Lord'! No coarse and sensuous delights of passion could live before the 'pure eyes and perfect witness' of God. In His 'presence' must be purity as well as 'fullness of joy.' If this festival teaches us, on the one hand, that they wofully misapprehend the spirit of godliness who do not find it full of gladsomeness, it teaches us no less, on the other, that they wofully misapprehend the spirit of joy, who look for it anywhere but 'before the Lord.' The ritual of the feast commanded gladness. Joy is a duty to God's children. There were mourners in Israel each year, as the feast came round, who would rather have shrunk into a corner, and let the bright stream of merriment flow past them; but they, too, had to open their heavy hearts, and to feel that, in spite of their private sorrows, they had a share in the national blessings. No grief should unfit us for feeling thankful joy for the great common gift of 'a common salvation.' The sources of religious joy, open to all Christians, are deeper than the fountains of individual sorrow, deep as life though these sometimes seem.

The wilderness life came into view in the feast as a wandering life of privation and change. The booths reminded of frail and shifting dwellings, and so made the contrast with present settled homes the sweeter. They were built, not of such miserable scrub as grew in the desert, and could scarcely throw shade enough to screen a lizard, but of the well-foliaged branches of trees grown by the rivers of water, and so indicated present abundance. The remembrance of privations and trials past, of which the meaning is understood, and the happy results in some degree possessed, is joy. Prosperous men like to talk of their early struggles and poverty. This feast teaches that such remembrance ought always to trace the better present to God, and that memory of conquered sorrows and trials is wholesome only when it is devout, and that the joy of present ease is bracing, not when it is self-sufficient, but when it is thankful. The past, rightly looked at, will yield for us all materials for a feast of tabernacles; and it is rightly looked at only when it is all seen as God's work, and as tending to settled peace and abundance. Therefore the regulations end with that emphatic seal of all His commands, to impress which on our hearts is the purpose of all His dealings with us as with Israel, 'I am the Lord your God.'

III. We may note our Lord's allusions to the feast. There are probably two, both referring to later additions to the ceremonies. One is in John vii. 37. We learn from the Talmud that on each of the seven days (and according to one Rabbi on the eighth also) a priest went down to Siloam and drew water in a golden pitcher, which he brought back amid the blare of trumpets to the altar, and poured into a silver basin while the joyous worshippers chanted the 'Great Hallel' (Psa. cxiii.-cxviii.), and thrice waved their palm branches as they sang. We may venture to suppose that this had been done for the last time; that the shout of song had scarcely died away when a stir in the crowd was seen, and a Galilean peasant stood forth, and there, before the priests with their empty vessels, and the hushed multitude, lifted up His voice, so as to be heard by all, and cried, saying: 'If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink.' What increased force is given to the extraordinary self-assertion of such words, if we picture this as the occasion of their utterance! Leviticus gives no preeminence to any one day, but John's expression, 'that great day of the feast,' may well have been warranted by later developments.

The other allusion is less certain, though it is probable. It is found in the saying at John viii. 12: 'I am the Light of the world,' etc. The Talmud gives a detailed account of the illuminations accompanying the feast. Four great golden lamps were set up in the court, each tended by four young priests. 'There was not a court in Jerusalem that was not lit up by the lights of the water-drawing.' Bands of grave men with flashing torches danced before the people, while Levites 'accompanied them with harps, psalteries, cymbals, and numberless musical instruments,' and another band of Levites standing on the fifteen steps which led to the women's court, chanted the fifteen so-called 'songs of degrees,' and yet others marched through the courts blowing their trumpets as they went. It must have been a wild scene, dangerously approximating to the excitement of heathen nocturnal festivals, and our Lord may well have sought to divert the spectators to higher thoughts. But the existence of the allusion is doubtful.

We have one more allusion to the feast, considered as a prophecy of the true rest and joy in the true Canaan. The same John, who has preserved Christ's references, gives one of his own in Revelation vii. 9, when he shows us the great multitude out of every nation 'with palms in their hands.' These are not the Gentile emblems of victory, as they are often taken to be. There are no heathen emblems in the Apocalypse, but all moved within the circle of Jewish types and figures. So we are to think of that crowd of 'happy palmers' as joyously celebrating the true feast of tabernacles in the settled home above, and remembering, with eyes made clear by heaven, the struggles and fleeting sorrows of the wilderness. The emblem sets forth heaven as a festal assembly, as the ingathering of the results of the toils of earth, as settled life after weary pilgrimage, as glad retrospect of the meaning and triumphant possession of the issues of God's patient guidance and wise discipline. Here we dwell in 'the earthly house of this tabernacle'; there, in a 'building of God . . . eternal.' Here we are agitated by change, and wearied by the long road; there, changeless but increasing joy will be ours, and the backward look of thankful wonder will enhance the sweetness of the blessed present, and confirm the calm and sure hope of an ever-growing glory stretching shoreless and bright before us.

SOJOURNERS WITH GOD

'The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is Mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with Me.'—Lev. xxv. 23.

The singular institution of the Jubilee year had more than one purpose. As a social and economical arrangement it tended to prevent the extremes of wealth and poverty. Every fiftieth year the land was to revert to its original owners, the lineal descendants of those who had 'come in with the conqueror,' Joshua. Debts were to be remitted, slaves emancipated, and so the mountains of wealth and the valleys of poverty were to be somewhat levelled, and the nation carried back to its original framework of a simple agricultural community of small owners, each 'sitting under his own vine and fig-tree' and, like Naboth, sturdily holding the paternal acres.

As a ceremonial institution it was the completion of the law of the Sabbath. The seventh day proclaimed the need for weekly rest from labour, and as was the sabbath in the week, so was the seventh year among the years—a time of quiet, when the land lay fallow and much of the ordinary labour was suspended. Nor were these all; when seven weeks of years had passed, came the great Jubilee year, charged with the same blessed message of Rest, and doubtless showing dimly to many wearied and tearful eyes some gleams of a better repose beyond.

Besides these purposes, it was appointed to enforce, and to make the whole fabric of the national wealth consciously rest upon, this thought contained in our text. The reason why the land was not to pass out of the hands of the representatives of those to whom God had originally given it, was that He had not really given it to them at all. It was not theirs to sell—they had only a beneficiary occupation. While they held it, it was still His, and neither they, nor any one to whom they might sell the use of it for a time, were anything more than tenants at will. The land was His, and they were only like a band of wanderers, squatting for a while by permission of the owner, on his estate. Their camp-fires were here to-day, but to-morrow they would be gone. They were 'strangers and sojourners.' That may sound sad, but all the sadness goes when we read on—'with Me.' They are God's guests, so though they do not own a foot of soil, they need not fear want.

All this is as true for us. We can have no better New Year's thoughts than those which were taught by the blast of the silver trumpets that proclaimed liberty to the slaves, and restored to the landless pauper his alienated heritage.

I. Here is the lesson of God's proprietorship and our stewardship.

'The land is Mine' was of course true in a special sense of the territory which God gave by promise and miracle, which was kept by obedience, and lost by rebellion. But it is as really true about our possessions, and that not only because of our transient stay here. It would be as true if we were to live in this world for ever. It will be as true in heaven. Length of time makes no difference in this tenure. Undisturbed possession for ever so long does not constitute ownership here. God is possessor of all, by virtue of His very nature, by His creation and preservation of us and of all things. So that when we talk about 'mine' and 'thine,' we are only speaking a half truth.

There is a great sovereign 'His' behind both. So then let us take that thought with us for use, as we pass into another year. What lessons does it give?

It should nurture constant thankfulness. To-day looking back over whatever dark, dreary, sunless days, we all have bright ones too. Does any thought of God as the Fountain of all our joys and goods rise in our souls? Have we learned to associate a divine hand and a Father's will with them? Do we congratulate ourselves on our own cleverness, tact, and skill, saying, 'mine hand hath done it,' or do we hug ourselves on our own good fortune, and burn incense to chance and 'circumstances'?—or, sadder still, are we generously grateful to every human friend that helps us, and unthankful only to God—or does the glad thought come, to gild the finest gold of our possessions with new brilliance and worth, and to paint and perfume the whitest lily of our joys with new delightsomeness, 'All things come of Thee'; 'Thou makest us drink of the river of Thy pleasures'? Blessed are they who, by the magic glass of a thankful heart, see all things in God, and God in all things. To them life is tenfold brighter, as a light plunged in oxygen flames more intensely than in common air. The darkest night is filled with light, and the loneliest place blazes with angel faces, and the stoniest pillar is soft, to him who sees everywhere the ladder that knits earth with heaven, and to whom all His blessings are as the messengers that descend by it on errands of mercy, whose long shining ranks lead up the eye and the heart to the loving God from whom they come.

Here too is the ground for constant thankful submission. 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away.' We have no right to murmur, however we may regret, if the Landowner takes back a bit of the land which He has let us occupy. It was the condition of our occupation that He should be at liberty to do so whenever He saw that it would be best for us. He does not give us our little patches for His advantage, but for ours, ncr does He take them away at His own whim, but 'for our profit.' We get more than full value for all the work and capital we have expended, and His only reason for ever disturbing us is that we may be driven to claim a better inheritance in Himself than we can find even in the best of His gifts. So He sometimes gives, that we may be led by our possessions to think lovingly of Him; and He sometimes takes, that we may be led, in the hour of emptiness and loss, to recognise whose hand it was that pulled up the props round which our poor tendrils clung. But the opposite actions have the same purpose, and like the up-and-down stroke of a piston, or the contrary motion of two cogged wheels that play into each other, are meant to impel us in one direction, even to the heart of God who is our home. A landowner stops up a private road one day in a year, in order to assert his right, and to remind the neighbourhood that he could stop it altogether if he liked. So God reminds us by our losses and sorrows, of what we are so apt to forget, and what it is such a joy to us to remember—His possession of them all. Blessed be God! He teaches us in that fashion far seldomer than in the other. Let joy teach us the lesson, and we shall the less need 'the sternest' teacher 'and the best,' even sorrow. Better to learn it by gladness than by tears; better to see it written in 'laughing flowers' than in desolate gardens and killing frost.

So, too, there should be a constant sense of responsibility in the use of all which we have. All is His, and He has given all to us, for a purpose. So, plainly, we are but stewards, or trustees, and are bound to employ everything, not according to our own inclination or notion of what is right, but according to what, in the exercise of our best and most impartial judgment, we believe to be the owner's will. Trusteeship means that we take directions as to the employment of the property from its owner. It means too that we employ it not for our own satisfaction and well-being alone, though that is included, and is a part of His purpose who 'delights in the prosperity of His servants.' Thoughts of others, thoughts of the owner's claims, and of bringing back to Him all that He has given to us, increased by our diligence, must be uppermost in our minds, if we are to live nobly or happily here. 'It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.' And this applies to all we have in mind, body, and estate. A thoughtful expenditure and use of all His gifts, on principles drawn from our knowledge of His will, and for objects not terminating with self, is the duty that corresponds to the great fact of God's ownership of all. If we use His gifts to minister to our own vanity or frivolity, or love of ease, or display; if an 'intolerable deal' of all we have is used for ourselves, and a poor ha'porth' for others; if our gifts are grudging; if we possess without sense of responsibility, and enjoy without thankfulness, and lose with murmuring; if our hearts are more set on material prosperity than on love and peace, knowledge and purity, noble lives and a Father God; if higher desires and hopes are dying out as we 'get on' in the world, and religious occupations which used to be pleasant are stale; then for all our outward Christianity the stern old woe applies, 'Your riches are corrupted, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you,' and we need the shrill note of the trumpet of Jubilee to be blown in our ears, 'The land is Mine.'

II. We have the teaching of the transiency of our stay here.

'Ye are strangers and sojourners'—pilgrims who make a brief halt in a foreign country. The image has in it an allusion to the nomad life of Abraham and his son and grandson, as well as to the desert-wanderings of the people, and suggests the thought, 'You are homeless wanderers, not having where to lay your heads, as truly when you have been settled for generations on your ancestral lands, as when you plodded wearily in the wilderness.' It is a universal truth, ever acknowledged and forgotten, wholesome though sometimes sad to feel, and preached to even frivolous natures by the change in our calendar which a New Year brings.

How vividly this word of our text brings out the contrast between the permanence of the external world and our brief stay in it!

In Israel there would be few vineyards or olive-grounds held by the same man at two, and none at three, successive jubilees. The hoary twisted olives yielded their black berries, say, to Simeon, the son of Joseph, to-day, as they did fifty years ago to Joseph, the son of Reuben, and as they will do fifty years hence to Judas, the son of Simeon. So is it with us all. There is nothing more pathetic than the thought of how generations come and go, and empires rise and fall, while the scene on which they play their brief parts remains the same.

'The mountains look on Marathon,
And Marathon looks on the sea.'

to-day as they did more than two millenniums ago, only the grass was for a while a little ranker on the plain. Olivet lifts the same outline against the pale morning twilight as when David went up its slope a weeping exile. The pebble that we kick out of our path had thousands of years of existence ere we were born, and may lie there unaltered to all appearance for centuries after we are dead. 'One generation cometh and another goeth, but the earth abideth for ever.'

And how much more lasting our possessions are than their possessors! Where are the strong hands that clutched the rude weapons that lie now quietly ticketed in our museums? How dim and dark the bright brave eyes that once flashed through the bars of these helmets, hanging just a little rusted, over the tombs in Westminster Abbey! Other men will live in our houses, read our books, own our mills, use our furniture, preach in our pulpits, sit in our pews: we are but lodgers in this abiding nature, 'like a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night,' and to-morrow morning vacates his rooms for a new arrival, and goes away unregretted and is forgotten in an hour.

The constant change and progression of life are enforced, too, in this metaphor.

The old threadbare emblem of a journey which is implied in the text suggests how, moment by moment, we hurry on and how everything is slipping past us, as fields and towns do to a traveller in a train. Only our journey is smooth and noiseless, like the old-fashioned canal boat travelling, where, if you shut your eyes, you could not tell that you were moving. We glide on and never know it, and so gradually and silently is the scene 'changed by still degrees,' that it is only now and then that men have any vivid consciousness that the 'fashion of this world is' ever 'in the act of passing,' like the canvas of a panorama ever winding and unwinding on its twin rollers with slow, equable motion. It needs an effort of attention and will to discern the movement, and it is worth while to make the effort, for that clear and poignant sense of the constant flux and mutation of all things around us, and of the ebbing away of our own lives, is fundamental to all elevation of thought, to all nobleness of deed, to all worthy conception of duty and of joy. Everything that is, stands poised, like Fortune, on a rolling ball. The solid earth is a movable sphere, for ever spinning on its axis and rushing on its path among the stars. Ever some star is sinking in mist, or dipping below the horizon; ever new constellations are climbing to the zenith. A long, patient discipline is needed to keep fresh in our hearts the sense of this transiency. Let us set ourselves consciously to deepen our convictions of it, and amidst all the illusions of these solid-seeming shows of things, keep firm hold of the assurance that they are but fleeting shadows that sweep across the solemn mountain's side, and that only God and the doing of His will lasts. So shall our life pierce down with its seeking roots to the abiding ground of all Being, and, looking to the 'things that are eternal,' we shall be able to make what is but for a moment contribute to the everlasting ennobling of our character and enrichment of our life yonder.

Surely these words, too, tell of the true home.

'Ye are strangers'—because your native land is elsewhere. It is not merely the physical facts of death and change that make us strangers here, but the direction of our desires, and the true affinities of our nature. If by these we belong to heaven and God, then here we shall feel that we have not where to lay our heads, and shall 'dwell in tabernacles' because 'we look for the city.'

What a contrast between the perishable tents of the wilderness and the rock-built mansions of that city. And how short this phase of being must look when seen from above! You remember how long a year, a week, seemed to you when a child—what do the first ten years of your life look to you now? What must the earthly life of Abel, the first who died, look to him even now, when he contrasts its short twenty or thirty years with the thousands since? and, after thousands and thousands more, how it will dwindle! So to us, if we reach that safe shore, and look back upon the sea that brought us thither, as it stretches to the horizon, miles of billows once so terrible will seem shrunken to a line of white foam.

Cherish, then, constant consciousness of that solemn eternity, and let your eyes be ever directed to it, like a man who sees some great flush of light on the horizon, and is ever turning from his work to look. Use the transient as preparation for the eternal, the fleeting days as those which determine the undying 'Day' and its character. Keep your cares and interests in the present rigidly limited to necessary things. Why should travellers burden themselves? The less luggage, the easier marching. The accommodation and equipment in the desert do not matter much. The wise man will say, 'Oh, it will do. I shall soon be home.' 'Ye are strangers and sojourners.'

III. We have here also the teaching of trust.

Some of us think that such thoughts as the preceding are sad. Why should they be so? They need not be. Our text adds a little word which takes all the sadness out of them. 'With Me'; that gives the true notion of our earthly life. We are strangers indeed, passing through a country which is not ours, but whilst we are sojourners, we are 'sojourners' with the king of the land. In the antique hospitable times, the chief of the tribe would take the travellers to his own tent, and charge himself with their safety and comfort. So we are God's guests on our travels. He will take care of us. The visitor has no need to trouble himself about the housekeeping, he may safely leave that with the master of the house. If the king has taken us in charge, we may be quite sure that no harm will come to us in his country. So for ourselves and for those we love, and for all the wide interests of church and world, there are peace and strength in the thought that we are the guests of God here, 'strangers and sojourners with *Him*.' Will He invite us to His table and let us hunger? Will He call us to be His guests, and then, like some traitorous Arab sheikh, break the laws of hospitality and harm His too-confiding guests? Impossible for evermore. So we are safe, and our bread shall be given us, for we are sojourners with God.

True, we are strangers, and in our constant movement we lose many of the companions of our march, and the track of the caravan may be traced by the graves on either side. But, since we are 'with Him,' we have companionship even when most solitary, and even in a strange land shall not be lonely. Seek then to cultivate as a joy and strength that consciousness that the Lord of all the land is ever with you. Whoever goes, He abides. Whatever rushes past us like a phantasmagoria, He passes not. Whatever and whoever change, He changes never. Where thou goest, He will go. He will be 'thy shield at thy right hand,' and thy 'keeper from all evil.' So, looking forward to the unknown days of another New Year, we may be of good cheer.

So will it be while we live; and if this year we should die—well, the King of this land, where we are strangers, is the King of the other land beyond the sea, where we are at home. So we shall only be the nearer to Him for the change. Death the separator shall but unite us to the King, whose presence indeed fills this subject-province of His empire with all its good, but who dwells in more resplendent 'beauty,' and is felt in greater nearness in the other 'land that is very far off.' Whether here or there, we may have God with us, if we will. With Him for our Host and companion, let us peacefully go on our road, while the life of strangers and sojourners shall last. It will bring us to the fatherland where we shall be at home with the King, and find in Him our 'sure dwelling, and quiet resting-place, and peaceful habitation for ever.'

GOD'S SLAVES

'For they are My servants, which I brought forth out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as bondmen.'—Lev. xxv. 42.

This is the basis of the Mosaic legislation as to slavery. It did not suppress but regulated that accursed system. Certainly Hebrew slavery was a very different thing from that of other nations. In the first place, no Jew was to be a slave. To that broad principle there were exceptions, such as the case of the man who voluntarily gave himself up to his creditor. But even he was not to be treated as a slave, but as a 'hired servant,' and at the jubilee was to be set free. There were also other regulations of various kinds in other circumstances on which we do not need to dwell. The slaves of alien blood were owned and used, but under great mitigations and restrictions.

Of course we have here an instance of the incompleteness of the Mosaic law,—or rather we may more truly say of its completeness, regard being had to the state of the world at the time. All social change hangs together. Institutions cannot be altered at a blow, without altering the stage of civilisation, of which they are the expression. 'Raw haste' is 'half-sister to delay.' What is good and necessary for one era is out of place in another. So God works slowly, and lets bad things die out, by changing the atmosphere in which they flourish.

All servitude to men was an infraction of God's rights over Israel. God was the Israelites' 'Master'; they were His 'slaves.' He was so, because He had 'broken the bands of their yoke, and set them free.' There is, then, here—

I. The ground of God's rights. 'I brought you forth.'

II. Our servitude because of our redemption. 'Ye are My servants.'

III. Our consequent freedom from all other masters. 'Ye shall not be sold as bondmen.'

THE KINSMAN REDEEMER

'After that he is sold he may be redeemed again; one of his brethren may redeem him.'—LEV. xxv. 48.

THERE are several of the institutions and precepts of the Mosaic legislation which, though not prophetic, nor typical, have yet remarkable correspondences with lofty Christian truth. They may be used as symbols, if only we remember that we are diverting them from their original purpose.

How singularly these words lend themselves to the statement of the very central truths of Christianity—a slavery which is not necessarily perpetual and a redemption effected by a kinsman!

That institution of the 'Goel' is of a very remarkable kind. and throws great light on Christian verities. I wish, in dealing with it, to guard against any idea that it was meant to be prophetic or typical.

I. The kinsman redeemer under the old law.

The strength of the family tie in the Israelitish polity was great. The family was the unit—hence there were certain duties devolving on the nearest male relative. These, so far as we are at present concerned, were three.

(*a*) The redemption of a slave. The Mosaic legislation about slavery was very remarkable. It did not nominally prohibit it, but it fenced it round and modified it, so as to make it another thing.

Israelites were allowed to hold Gentile slaves, but under careful restrictions. Israelites were allowed to sell themselves as slaves. If the sale was to Israelites, the slavery was ended in six years or at the jubilee, whichever period came first—unless the slave had his ear bored to the doorpost to intimate his contentment in service (Exod. xxi. 5, 6). This is not slavery in our sense of the word, but only a six years' engagement. If sold to a heathen in Israel, then the Goel had to redeem him; and the reason for this was that all Israelites belonged to God.

(*b*) The redemption of an inheritance.

This was the task of the kinsman-goel. The land belonged to the tribe. Pauperism was thus kept off. There could be no 'submerged tenth.' The theocratic reason was, 'the land shall not be sold at all for ever for it is Mine!'

(*c*) The avenging of murder. Blood feuds were thus checked, though not abolished. The remarkable institution of 'cities of refuge' gave opportunity for deliberate investigation into each case. If wilful murder was proved, the murderer was given up to the Goel for retribution; if death had been by misadventure, the slayer was kept in the city of refuge till the high-priest's decease.

This is the germ of the figure of the Redeemer-Kinsman in later Scripture. Notice how higher ideas began to gather round the office. The prophets felt that in some way God was their 'Goel.' In Isaiah the application of the name to Him is frequent and, we might almost say, habitual. So in Psalm xlix. 7, 'None can be Goel to his brother'; verse 15, 'God will be Goel to my soul from the power of the grave.'

Job xix. 25, 'I know that my Goel liveth. . . .'

II. Our Kinsman-Redeemer.

The New Testament metaphor of 'Redemption' or buying back with a ransom is distinctly drawn from the Hebrew Goel's office.

Christ is the Kinsman. The brotherhood of Christ with us was voluntarily assumed, and was for the purpose of redeeming His brethren.

He is the Kinsman-Redeemer from slavery,—a slavery which is voluntary. The soul is self-delivered to evil and sin; but blessed be God! this slavery is terminable. The kinship of Christ was needful for our redemption. 'It behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren.' He thus gave His life a 'ransom' for many. Note the objective value of His atonement, and its subjective power as setting us free.

He is the Kinsman-Redeemer of our inheritance. God is the inheritance here. The manhood of Jesus brings God back to us for our—(1) Knowledge; (2) Love; (3) Possession. Heaven is our inheritance hereafter. His manhood secures it for us. 'I go to prepare a place for you.' 'An inheritance incorruptible.' 'The redemption of the purchased possession.'

The Kinsman-Avenger of blood. It is only in a modified sense that we can transfer this part of the Goel's office to Jesus. The old Kinsman-Avenger of blood avenged it by shedding the shedder's blood in retribution. But that was not the kind of vindication (for Goel means also Vindicator) for which Job looked when he used the expression. Resurrection to the vision of God was to come to him 'at the last,' by the standing of his Goel on the earth, and that was to be the true avenging of his death, and his vindication. The great murderer Death is to die, and his victims are to be wrested from him, and their death be proved to be the means of their fuller life. 'Precious shall their blood be in His sight,' and when their slayer is slain they will live for ever, partakers of their Kinsman-Redeemer's glory, because they had been partakers of His death, and His blood had been precious in their sight. Let us cling to our Kinsman-Redeemer in all our life that He may give us freedom and an inheritance among His brethren, and, closing our eyes in death, we may commend our spirits to the 'Angel that redeemed us from all evil,' and be sure that He will 'redeem' our 'souls from the power of the grave.'

THE OLD STORE AND THE NEW

'Ye shall eat old store, and bring forth the old because of the new.
LEV. xxvi. 10.

THIS is one of the blessings promised to obedience. No doubt it, like the other elements of that 'prosperity' which 'is the blessing of the Old Testament,' presupposes a supernatural order of things, in which material well-being was connected with moral good far more closely and certainly than we see to be the case. But the spirit and heart of the promise remain, however the form of it may have passed away. It is a picturesque way of saying that the harvest shall be more than enough for the people's wants. All through the winter, and the spring, and the ripening summer, their granaries shall yield supplies. There will be no season of scarcity such as often occurs in countries whose communications are imperfect, just before harvest, when the last year's crop is exhausted, and it is hard to get anything to live on till this year's is ready. But when the new wheat comes in they will have still much of the old, and will have to 'bring it forth' to empty their barns, to make room for the fresh supplies which the blessing of God has sent before they were needed. The same idea of superabundant yield from the fields is given under another form in a previous verse of this chapter (ver. 5): 'Your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time, and ye shall eat your bread to the full': which reminds one of the striking prophecy of Amos: 'Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed.' So rapid the growth, and so large the fruitfulness, that the gatherer shall follow close on the heels of the sower, and will not have accomplished his task before it is again time to sow. The prophet clearly has in his mind the old promise of the law, and applies it to higher matters, even to the fields white to harvest, where 'he that soweth and he that reapeth shall rejoice together.' In the same way we may take these words, and gather from them better promises and larger thoughts than they originally carried.

There is in them a promise as to the fullness of the divine gifts, which has a far wider reach and nobler application than to the harvests and granaries of old Palestine.

We may take the words in that aspect, first, as containing God's pledge that these outward gifts shall come in unbroken continuity. And have they not so come to us all, for all these long years? Has there ever been a gap left yawning? has there ever been a break in the chain of mercies and supplies? has it not rather been that 'one post ran to meet another,' that before one of the messengers had unladed all his budget, another's arrival has antiquated and put aside his store? True, we are often brought very low; there may not be much in the barn but sweepings, and a few stray grains scattered over the floor. We may have but a handful of meal in the barrel, and be ready to dress it 'that we may eat it, and die.' But it never really comes to that. The new ever comes before the old is all eaten up; or if it be delayed even beyond that time, it comes before the hunger reaches inanition. It may be good that we should have to trust Him, even when the storehouse is empty; it may be good for us to know something of want, but that discipline comes seldom, and is never carried very far. For the most part He anticipates wants by gifts, and His good gifts overlap each other in our outward lives as slates on a roof, or scales on a fish.

We wonder at the smooth working of the machinery for feeding a great city; and how, day by day, the provisions come at the right time, and are parted out among hundreds of thousands of homes. But we seldom think of the punctual love, the perfect knowledge, the profound wisdom which cares for us all, and is always in time with its gifts. It was that quality of punctuality extended over a whole universe which seemed so wonderful to the Psalmist: 'The eyes of all wait upon Thee, and Thou givest them their meat in due season.' God's machinery for distribution is perfect, and its very perfection, with the constancy of the resulting blessings, robs Him of His praise, and hinders our gratitude. By assiduity He loses admiration.

'Things grown common lose their dear delight.' 'If in His gifts and benefits He were more sparing and close-handed,' said Luther, 'we should learn to be thankful.' But let us learn it by the continuity of our joys, that we may not need to be taught it by their interruption; and let us still all tremulous anticipation of possible failure or certain loss by the happy confidence which we have a right to cherish, that His mercies will meet our needs, continuous as they are, and be strung so close together on the poor thread of our lives that no gap will be discernible in the jewelled circle.

May we not apply that same thought of the unbroken continuity of God's gifts to the higher region of our spiritual experience? His supplies of wisdom, love, joy, peace, power, to our souls are always enough and more than enough for our wants. If ever men complain of languishing vitality in their religious emotions, or of a stinted supply of food for their truest self, it is their own fault, not His. He means that there should be no parentheses of famine in our Christian life. It is not His doing if times of torpor alternate with seasons of quick energy and joyful fullness of life. So far as He is concerned the flow is uninterrupted, and if it come to us in jets and spurts as from an intermittent well, it is because our own fault has put some obstacle to choke the channel and dam out His Spirit from our spirits. We cannot too firmly hold, or too profoundly feel, that an unbroken continuity of supplies of His grace—unbroken and bright as a sunbeam reaching in one golden shaft all the way from the sun to the earth—is His purpose concerning us. Here, in this highest region, the thought of our text is most absolutely true; for He who gives is ever pouring forth His own self for us to take, and there is no limit to our reception but our capacity and our desire; nor any reason for a moment's break in our possession of love, righteousness, peace, but our withdrawal of our souls from beneath the Niagara of His grace. As long as we keep our poor vessels below that constant downpour they will be full. It is all our own blame if they are empty. Why should Christian people have these dismal times of deadness, these parentheses of paralysis? as if their growth must be like that of a tree with its alternations of winter sleep and summer waking? In regard to outward blessings we are, as it were, put upon rations, and 'that He gives' us we 'gather.' There He sometimes does, in love and wisdom, put us on very short allowance, and even now and then causes 'the fields to yield no meat.' But never is it so in the higher region. There He puts the key of the storehouse into our own hands, and we may take as much as we will, and have as much as we take. There the bread of God is given for evermore, and He wills that in uninterrupted abundance 'the meek shall eat and be satisfied.'

The source is full to overflowing, and there are no limits to the supply. The only limit is our capacity, which again is largely determined by our desire. So after all His gifts there is more yet unreceived to possess. After all His Self-revelation there is more yet unspoken to declare. Great as is the goodness which He has 'wrought before the sons of men for them that trust in Him,' there are far greater treasures of goodness 'laid up' in the deep mines of God 'for them that fear Him.' Bars of uncoined treasure and ingots of massy gold lie in His storehouses, to be put into circulation as soon as we need, and can use, them. Hence we have the right to look for an endless increase in our possession of God; and from the consideration of an Infinite Spirit that imparts Himself, and of finite but indefinitely expansible spirits that receive, the certainty arises of an endless life for us of growing glory; a heaven of ceaseless advance, where in constant alternation desire shall widen capacity, and capacity increase fruition, and fruition lead in, not satiety, but quickened appetite and deeper longing.

But we may also see in this text the prescription of a duty as well as the announcement of a promise. There is direction here as to our manner of receiving God's gifts, as well as large assurance as to His manner of bestowing them. It is His to substitute the new for the old. It is ours gladly to accept the exchange, a task not always easy or pleasant.

No doubt there is a natural love of change deep in us all, but that is held in check by its opposite, and all poetry and human life itself are full of the sadness born of mutation. Our Lord laid bare a deep tendency, when He said, 'No man having tasted old wine, straightway desireth new; because he saith the old is better.' We cling to what is familiar, in the very furniture of our houses; and yet we are ever being forced to accept what is strange and new, and, like some fresh article in a room, is out of harmony with the well-worn things that we have seen standing in their corners for years. It takes some time for the raw look to wear off, and for us to 'get used to it,' as we say. So is it, though often for deeper reasons, in far more important things. A man, for instance, has been engaged in some kind of business for years, and at last God shows him, by clear indications, that he must turn to something else. How slow he is to see it, how reluctant to do it! How he cleaves to the 'old store'! How he shrinks from clearing out the barn, to bring in the new! Or a household has been going on for many days unbroken, and at last a time comes when some of its members have to pass out into new circumstances; a son to push his way in the world, a daughter to brighten another fireside. It is hard for the parents to enter fully into the high hopes of their children, and to accept the new condition, without many vain longings for the old days that can never come back any more. So, all through our lives, wisdom and faith say, 'Bring forth the old because of the new.' Accept cheerfully the law of constant change under which God's love has set us. Do not let the pleasant bonds of habit tie down your hearts so tightly to the familiar possessions that you shrink from the introduction of fresh elements. Be sure that the new comes from the same loving hand which sent the old in its season, and that change is meant to be progress. Do not confine yourselves within any mill-horse round of associations and occupations. Front the vicissitudes of life, not merely with brave patience, but with happy confidence, for they all come from Him whose love is older than your oldest blessings, and whose mercies, new every morning, express themselves afresh through every change. Welcome the new, treasure the old, and in both see the purpose of that loving Father who, Himself unchanged, changeth all things, and

> '. . . fulfils Himself in many ways,
> Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.'

In higher matters than these our text may give us counsel as to our duty. 'God hath more light yet to break forth from His holy word.' We are bound to welcome new truth, so soon as to our apprehensions it has made good its title, and not to refuse it lodgment in our minds because it needs the displacement of their old contents. In the regions of our knowledge and of our Christian life, most chiefly, are we under solemn obligations to 'bring forth the old store because of the new'; if we would not be unfaithful to God's great educational process that goes on through all our lives. It is often difficult to adjust the relations of our last lesson with our previous possessions. There is always a temptation to make too much of a new truth, and to fancy that it will produce more change in our whole mental furniture than it really will do. No man is less likely to come to the knowledge of the truth than he who is always deep in love with some new thought. 'the Cynthia of the minute,' and ever ready to barter 'old lamps for new ones.' But all these things admitted, still it remains true that we are here to learn, that our education is to go on all our days, and that here on earth it can only be carried out by our parting with the old store, which may have become musty by long lying in the granaries, to make room for the new, just gathered in the ripened field. The great central truths of God in Christ are to be kept for ever; but we shall come to grasp them in their fullness only by joyfully welcoming every fresh access of clearer light which falls upon them; and gladly laying aside our inadequate thoughts of God's permanent revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ, to house and garner in heart and spirit the fuller knowledge which it may please Him to impart.

So the law for life is thankful enjoyment of the old store, and openness of mind and freedom of heart which permit its unreluctant surrender when newer harvests ripen. And the highest form of the promise of our text will be when we pass into another world, and its rich abundance is poured out into our laps. Blessed are they who can willingly put away the familiar blessings of earth, and stretch out, willingly emptied, expectant hands to meet the 'new store' of Heaven!

EMANCIPATED SLAVES

'I am the Lord your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, that ye should not be their bondmen; and I have broken the bands of your yoke, and made you go upright.'—Lev. xxvi. 13.

The history of Israel is a parable and a prophecy as well as a history.

The great central word of the New Testament has been drawn from it, viz. 'redemption,' *i.e.* a buying out of bondage.

The Hebrew slaves in Egypt were 'delivered.' The deliverance made them a nation. God acquired them for Himself, and they became His servants.

The great truths of the gospel are all there.

Henceforth the fact of their deliverance became the basis of all His appeals to them; the ground of His law; the reason for their obedience. In the previous context it has shaped the institution of slavery. Here it is the foundation of a general exhortation to obedience. The emphatic picture of the men stooping beneath the yoke, and then straightening themselves up, erect, illustrates the joyful freedom which Christ gives. That freedom is our subject.

I. Jesus gives freedom from the slavery of sin.

Freedom consists in power to follow unhindered the law of our being. So sin is slavery because it is contrary to that law.

When Jesus promised freedom through the truth, the Jews indignantly spurned the offer with the proud boast, which the presence of a Roman garrison in Jerusalem should have made to stick in their throats: 'We were never in bondage to any man.' A like hardy shutting of eyes to plain facts characterises the attitude of multitudes to the Christian view of man's condition. Jesus answered the Jews by the deep saying: 'He that committeth sin is the servant of sin.' A man fancies himself showing off his freedom by throwing off the restraints of morality or law, and by 'doing as he likes,' but he is really showing his servitude. Self-will looks like liberty, but it is serfdom. The libertine is a slave. That slavery under sin takes two forms. The man who sins is a slave to the power of sin. Will and conscience are meant to guide and impel us, and we never sin without first coercing or silencing them and subjecting them to the upstart tyranny of desires and senses which should obey and not command. The 'beggars' are on horseback, and the 'princes' walking. There is a servile revolt, and we know what horrors accompany that.

But that slavery under sin is shown also by the terrible force with which any sin, if once committed, appeals to the doer to repeat it. It is not only in regard to sensual sins that the awful insistence of habit grips the doer, and makes it the rarest thing that evil once done is done only once.

But he who sins is also a slave to the guilt of sin. True, that sense of guilt is for the most part and in most men dormant, but the snake is but hibernating, and often wakes and stings at most unexpected moments. 'The deceitfulness of sin' lies to the sinner, so that for the most part he 'wipes his mouth, saying I have done no harm,' but some chance incident may at any time, and certainly something will at some time, dissipate the illusion, as a stray sunbeam might scatter a wisp of mist and show startled eyes the grim fact that had always been there. And even while not consciously felt, guilt hampers the soul's insight into divine realities, clips its wings so that it cannot soar, paralyses its efforts after noble aims, and inclines it to ignoble grovelling as far away from thoughts of God and goodness as may be.

Christ makes the man bound and tied by the cords of his sins lift himself up and stand erect. By His death He brings forgiveness which removes guilt and the consciousness of it. By His inbreathed life He gives a new nature akin to His own, and brings into force a new motive, even transforming love, which is stronger than the death with which sin has cursed its doers. 'The law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.'

II. Jesus gives freedom from a slavish relation to God.

Apart from Him, God, if recognised at all, is for the most part thought of as 'austere, reaping where He did not sow,' and His commandments as grievous. Men may sullenly recognise that they cannot resist, but they do not submit. They may obey in act, but there is no obedience in their wills, nor any cheerfulness in their hearts. The elder brother in the parable could say, 'Neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment,' but his service had been joyless, and he never remembered having received gifts that made him 'merry with his friends.'

But from all such slavish, and therefore worthless, obedience, and all such reluctant, and therefore unreal, submission, Jesus liberates those who believe on Him and abide in His word. He declares God as our loving Father, and through Him we have authority to become sons of God. He 'sends forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts,' and that makes us to be no more slaves but sons. Sullen obedience becomes glad choice, and it is the inmost desire, and the deepest delight, of the loving child to do always the things that please the loving Father. 'I ought' and 'I will' coalesce, and so there is no slavery, but perfect freedom, in recognising and bowing to the great 'I must' which sweetly rules the life.

III. Christ gives deliverance from servility to men.

We need not touch on the historical connection, plain as that is, between modern conceptions of individual freedom and the influence of Christ's teaching. Modern democracy is rooted in Christ, though it is often unaware of its genesis, and blindly attacks the force to which it owes its existence.

Because all men are redeemed by Christ, because by that redemption all stand in the same relation to Him, because all have equal access to Him, and are taught and guided by His Spirit, because 'we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ,' therefore class prerogatives and subject classes fade away, and there is 'neither bond nor free,' but 'all are one in Christ Jesus.'

But there are other ways in which men tyrannise over men and in which Christ's redemption sets us free.

There is the undue authority of favourite teachers and examples.

There is the tyranny of public opinion.

There is undue regard to human approbation.

There is the sway of priestcraft.

How does Christianity deliver from these? It makes Christ's law our unconditional duty. It makes His approbation our highest joy. It gives legitimate scope to the instinct of loyalty, submission, and imitation, and of subjection to authority. It reduces to insignificance men's judgment, and all their loud voices to a babble of nothings. 'With me it is a very small matter to be judged of man's judgment.' It brings the soul into direct communion with God, and sweeps away all intermediaries.

'Not for that we have dominion over your faith but are helpers of your joy; for by faith ye stand.'

So personal independence and individuality of character are the result of Christianity. 'I have made you go upright.

IV. Christ gives us freedom from the power of circumstances.

Most men are made by these. We need not here enter on questions of the influence of their environment on all men's development.

But Christ gives us—

(*a*) A great aim for our lives high above these.

(*b*) A foothold in Him outside of them. We are not the slaves of our circumstances, but their masters.

(*c*) The power to utilise them.

So Christians are 'free' in all senses of the word.

The great Act of Emancipation has been passed for us all. Only Christ has rule over us, and we have our perfect freedom in His service. We have been sitting in the prison-house, and He has come and declared 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me to proclaim liberty to the captives.'

THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

THE WARFARE OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE

'All that enter in to perform the service, to do the work in the tabernacle.'
NUM. iv. 23.

THESE words occur in the series of regulations as to the functions of the Levites in the Tabernacle worship. The words 'to perform the service' are, as the margin tells us, literally, to 'war the warfare.' Although it may be difficult to say why such very prosaic and homely work as carrying the materials of the Tabernacle and the sacrificial vessels was designated by such a term, the underlying suggestion is what I desire to fix upon now—viz., that work for God, of whatever kind it be, which Christian people are bound to do, and which is mainly service for men for God's sake, will never be rightly done until we understand that it is a *warfare*, as well as a work.

The phrase on which I am commenting occurs again and again in the regulations as to the Levitical service, and is applied, not only as in my text to those who were told off to bear the burdens on the march, but also to the whole body of Levites, who did the inferior services in connection with the ritual worship. They were not, as it would appear, sacrificing priests, but they belonged to the same tribe as these, and they had sacred functions to discharge. So we come to this principle, that Christian service is to be looked at as warfare.

Now, that is a principle which ought to be applied to all Christians. For there is no such thing as designating a portion of Christ's Church to service which others have not to perform. The distinction of 'priest' and 'layman' existed in the Old Testament; it does not exist under the New Covenant, and there is no obligation upon any one Christian man to devote himself for Christ's sake to Christ's service and man's help (which is Christ's service), that does not lie equally upon all Christian people. The function is the same for all; the methods of discharging it may be widely different. Within the limits of the priestly tribe there may still be those whose office it is to carry the vessels, and those whose office it is to act more especially as ministering priests; but they are all 'of the tribe of Levi.' We, if we are Christian people at all, are all bound to do this work of 'the tabernacle,' and war this warfare.

It is important that we Christian people should elevate our thoughts of our duties in the world to the height of this great metaphor. The metaphor of the Christian life as being a 'warfare' is familiar enough, but that is not exactly the point which I wish to dwell upon now. When we speak about 'fighting the good fight of faith,' we generally mean our wrestle and struggle with our own evils and with the things that hinder us from developing a Christlike character, and 'growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' But it is another sort of warfare about which I am now speaking, the warfare which every Christian man has to wage who flings himself into the work of diminishing the world's miseries and sins, and tries to make people better, and happier because they are better. That is a fight, and will always be so, if it is rightly done.

I. Think of the foes.

Speaking generally, society is constituted upon a non-Christian basis. We talk about 'Christian' nations. There is not one on the face of the earth. There is not a nation whose institutions and maxims and politics and the practices of its individual members are ruled and moulded predominantly by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So every man that has come into personal touch with that Lord, and has felt that His commandments are the supreme authority in his own individual life, when he goes out into society, comes full tilt against a whole host of things that are in pronounced antagonism, or in real though unacknowledged contradiction, to the principles by which a Christian has to live for himself, and to commend to his brethren. So we have to fight. There are two things to be done—the imparting of good which will increase the sum of the world's happiness, and the destruction of evil, which will subtract some of the world's sorrows. The latter is always a conflict, for there are arrayed in defence of the evil vested interests, and the influence of habit, and the lowered vitality and sensitiveness of conscience which has come from breathing the polluted atmosphere which evil has vitiated. So that if we set ourselves, in humble, quiet, out-and-out dependence on Jesus Christ and submission to His will, to lead other people to submit to His will, there is nothing in the world more certain than that we shall find against us, starting up, as it were, out of the mist and taking form suddenly, a whole host of enemies. So we Christian men, as individuals, as members of a community and able to bring some influence to bear upon the conscience of society, have to fight against popular social evils, and to war for righteousness' sake.

There is another foe. There is nothing that men dislike more than being lifted up into a clearer atmosphere and made to see truths which they do not see or care for. When we first become Christians we are all hot to go and teach and preach; and we fancy that we have only to stand up, with a Bible in our hand, and read two or three texts, and our fellows will grasp them as gladly as we have done. But soon we find out that it is not so easy to draw men to Christ as we thought it would be. We have to fight against gravitation and unwillingness, when we would lift a poor brother into the liberty and the light that we are in. We have to struggle with the men that we are trying to help. We have to war, in order to bring 'the peace of God which passes understanding' into their hearts.

But the worst of all our foes, in doing Christian service, is our own miserable selves, with our laziness, and our vanity, and our wondering what A, B, and C will think about us, and the mingling of impure motives with nobler ones, and our being angry with people because they are so insensible, not so much to Christ's love as to our words and pleadings. Unless we can purge all that devil's leaven out of ourselves, we have little chance of working 'the work of the tabernacle,' or warring the warfare of God. Ah! brethren, to do anything for this world of unbelief and sin, of which we ourselves are part, is a struggle. And I know of no work that needs more continual putting a firm heel upon self, in all its subtle manifestations, than the various forms of Christian service. Not only we preachers, but Sunday-school teachers, mothers in their nurseries, teaching their children, and all of us, if we are trying to do anything for men, for Christ's sake, must feel, if we are honest with ourselves and about our work, that the first condition of success in it is to fight down self, and that only then, being emptied of ourselves, are we ready to be filled with the Spirit, by which we are made mighty to pull down the strongholds of sin.

II. The weapons of this warfare.

There are two great passages in the New Testament, both of which deal with the Christian life under this metaphor of warfare. One of these is the detailed description of the Christian armour in the Epistle to the Ephesians. There we have described the equipment for that phase of the fight of the Christian life which has to do mainly with the perfecting of the individual character. But somewhat different is the armour which is to be worn, when the Christian man goes out into the world to labour and to wage war there for Jesus Christ. We may turn, then, rather to the other of the two passages in question for the descriptions of the equipment, armour, and weapons of the Christian in his warfare for the spread of truth and goodness in the world. The passage to which I refer is in 2 Cor. vi. What are the weapons that Paul specifies in that place? I venture to alter their order, because he seems to have put them down just as they came into his mind, and we can put some kind of logical sequence into them. 'By the Word of God'—that is the first one. 'By the Holy Ghost,' which is otherwise given as 'by the power of God,' is the next. Get your minds and hearts filled with the truth of the Gospel, and dwell in fellowship with God, baptized with His Holy Spirit; and then you will be clothed 'as with a vesture down to your heels' with the power of God. These are the divine side, the weapons given us from above—'the Word of God' which is 'the sword of the Spirit,' and the indwelling Holy Ghost manifesting Himself in power. Then follow a series of human qualities which, though they are 'the fruit of the Spirit,' are yet not produced in us without our own co-operation. We have to forge and sharpen these weapons, though the fire in which they are forged is from above, and the metal of which they are made is given from heaven, like meteoric iron. These are 'kindness, long-suffering, love unfeigned.' We have to dismiss from our minds the ordinary characteristics of warfare in thinking of that which Christians are to wage. Like the old Knights Templars, we must carry a sword which has a cross for its hilt, and must be clad in gentleness, and long-suffering, and unfeigned love. 'The wrath of men worketh not the righteousness of God.' You cannot bully people into Christianity, you cannot scold them into goodness. There must be sweetness in order to attract, and he imperfectly echoes the music of the voice that came from 'the lips into which grace was poured,' whose words are harsh and rough, and who preaches the Gospel as if he were thundering damnation into people's ears.

Brethren, whatever be our warfare against sin, we must never lose our tempers. Harsh words break no bones indeed, but neither do they break hearts. A character like Jesus Christ—that is the victorious weapon. Let a man go and live in the world with these weapons that I have been naming, the truth of God in his heart, the Holy Spirit in his spirit, the power that comes therefrom animating his deadness and strengthening his weakness, and himself an emblem and an embodiment of the redeeming love of Christ—and though he spoke no word he would be sure to preach Christ; and though he struck no blow he would be a formidable antagonist to the hosts of evil, and the icebergs of sin and godlessness would run down into water before his silent and omnipotent shining. These are the weapons.

III. Note the temper, or disposition, of the Christian warrior-servant.

Courage goes without saying. If a man expects to be beaten, and to do nothing by his Christian witness but clear his conscience, he deserves nothing else than what he will get—viz. that his expectation will be fulfilled and he *will* do nothing else *but* clear his conscience, and that imperfectly. That is why so many preachers and Sunday-school teachers never see any conversions in their congregation or classes—because they do not expect any; because they go to their work without the enthusiastic boldness which would give power to their utterances.

I suppose concentration, too, goes without saying. When a man is on the battlefield with the swords whirling about his head, and the bayonets an inch from his breast, he does not go dreaming of scenes a hundred miles off, or think anything else than the one thing, how to keep a whole skin and wound an enemy. If Christian men will do their work in the dawdling, half-interested, and half-indifferent way in which so many of us promenade through our Christian service as if it was a review and not a fight, they are not likely to bring back many trophies of victory. You must put your whole selves into the battle. I said we must subdue ourselves ere we begin to fight. That is no contradiction to what I am saying now, for, as we all know, there is a distinction between the two selves in us—the self-centred self, which is to be crucified, and the God-centred self, which is to be nourished. You must put your whole selves into the battle.

There must, too, be discipline. One difference between a mob and an army is that the mob has as many wills as there are heads in it, and the army has only one will, that of the commander. He says to one man 'Go!' and he goes, and gets shot; and to another one 'Come!' and he comes; and to a third one 'Do this!' and, no matter what it is, straightway he goes and does it. So if we are soldiers we have to take orders from headquarters, and to be sure that we pay no attention to any other commands. Suppose a man is set at a certain post by his captain, and a corporal comes and says, 'You go and do this other thing; never mind your post, I will look after that,' to obey that is mutiny. If Jesus Christ tells you to do anything, and any others say 'Do not do it just yet!' neglect them, and obey Him. If your own heart says, 'Stop a little while and try something other and easier before you tackle that task,' be sure of the Captain's voice, and then, whatever happens, obey, and obey at once. Warfare is a diabolical thing, but there is a divine beauty in one aspect of it—

Their's not to make reply,
Their's not to reason why,
Their's but to do—

even if it mean 'to die.' Thus let us wage warfare.

IV. The Relieving Guard.

This metaphor of warfare is used in the Book of Job, in a passage where our English Version does not show it. So I venture to substitute the right translation for the one in the Authorised Version, 'All the days of my warfare will I wait till my change comes.' The guard will be relieved some day, and the private that has been tramping up and down in the dark or the snow, perhaps within rifle's length of the enemy, will shoulder his gun and go into the comfortable guard-house, and hang up his knapsack, and fling off his dirty boots, and sit down by the fire, and make himself comfortable. There is a 'heavenly manner of relieving guard.' Soon it will be the end of the sentry's time, and then, as one of those that had done a good day's work, and a long one, said with a sigh of relief, 'I have fought a good fight.' Henceforth the helmet is put off, which is 'the hope of salvation,' and the crown is put on, which is salvation in its fullness. 'All the days of my warfare will I wait'—till my Captain relieves the guard.

THE GUIDING PILLAR

'So it was alway: the cloud covered [the tabernacle] by day, and the appearance of fire by night.'—NUM. ix. 16.

THE children of Israel in the wilderness, surrounded by miracle, had nothing which we do not possess. They had some things in an inferior form; their sustenance came by manna, ours comes by God's blessing on our daily work, which is better. Their guidance came by this supernatural pillar; ours comes by the reality of which that pillar was nothing but a picture. And so, instead of fancying that men thus led were in advance of us, we should learn that these, the supernatural manifestations, visible and palpable, of God's presence and guidance were the beggarly elements: 'God having provided some better thing for us that they without us should not be made perfect.'

With this explanation of the relation between the miracle and symbol of the Old, and the reality and standing miracle of the New. Covenants, let us look at the eternal truths, which are set before us in a transitory form, in this cloud by day and fiery pillar by night.

I. Note, first, the double form of the guiding pillar.

The fire was the centre, the cloud was wrapped around it. The former was the symbol, making visible to a generation who had to be taught through their senses, the inaccessible holiness and flashing brightness and purity of the divine nature; the latter tempered and veiled the too great brightness for feeble eyes.

The same double element is found in all God's manifestations of Himself to men. In every form of revelation are present both the heart and core of light, which no eye can look upon, and the merciful veil which, because it veils, unveils; because it hides, reveals; makes visible because it conceals; and shows God because it is 'the hiding of His power.' So, through all the history of His dealings with men, there has ever been what is called in Scripture language the 'face,' or the 'name of God'; the aspect of the divine nature on which the eye can look; and manifested through it, there has always been the depth and inaccessible abyss of that Infinite Being. We have to be thankful that in the cloud is the fire, and that round the fire is the cloud. For only so can our eyes behold and our hands grasp the else invisible and remote central Sun of the universe. God hides to make better known the glories of His character. His revelation is the flashing of the uncreated and intolerable light of His infinite Being through the encircling clouds of human conceptions and words, or of deeds which each show forth, in forms fitted to our apprehension, some fragment of His lustre. After all revelation, He remains unrevealed. After ages of showing forth His glory, He is still 'the King invisible, whom no man hath seen at any time nor can see.' The revelation which He makes of Himself is 'truth and is no lie.' The recognition of the presence in it of both the fire and the cloud does not cast any doubt on the reality of our imperfect knowledge, or of the authentic participation in the nature of the central light, of the sparkles of it which reach us. We know with a real knowledge what we know of Him. What He shows us is Himself, though not His whole self.

This double aspect of all possible revelation of God, which was symbolised in comparatively gross external form in the pillar that led Israel on its march, and lay stretched out and quiescent, a guarding covering above the Tabernacle when the weary march was still, recurs all through the history of Old Testament revelation by type and prophecy and ceremony, in which the encompassing cloud was comparatively dense, and the light which pierced it relatively faint. It reappears in both elements in Christ, but combined in new proportions, so as that 'the veil, that is to say, His flesh,' is thinned to transparency and all aglow with the indwelling lustre of manifest Deity. So a light, set in some fair alabaster vase, shines through its translucent walls, bringing out every delicate tint and meandering vein of colour, while itself diffused and softened by the enwrapping medium which it beautifies by passing through its purity. Both are made visible and attractive to dull eyes by the conjunction. 'He that hath seen Christ hath seen the Father,' and he that hath seen the Father in Christ hath seen the man Christ, as none see Him who are blind to the incarnate deity which illuminates the manhood in which it dwells.

But we have to note also the varying appearance of the pillar according to need. There was a double change in the pillar according to the hour, and according as the congregation was on the march or encamped. By day it was a cloud, by night it glowed in the darkness. On the march it moved before them, an upright pillar, as gathered together for energetic movement; when the camp rested it 'returned to the many thousands of Israel' and lay quietly stretched above the Tabernacle like one of the long-drawn, motionless clouds above the setting summer sun, glowing through all its substance with unflashing radiance reflected from unseen light, and 'on all the glory' (shrined in the Holy Place beneath) was 'a defence.'

Both these changes of aspect symbolise for us the reality of the Protean capacity of change according to our ever-varying needs, which for our blessing we may find in that ever-changing, unchanging, divine Presence which will be our companion, if we will.

It was not only by a natural process that, as daylight declined, what had seemed but a column of smoke in the fervid desert sunlight, brightened into a column of fire, blazing amid the clear stars. But we may well believe in an actual admeasurement of the degree of light, correspondent to the darkness and to the need for certitude and cheering sense of God's protection, which the defenceless camp would feel as they lay down to rest.

When the deceitful brightness of earth glistens and dazzles around us, our vision of Him may be 'a cloudy screen to temper the deceitful ray'; and when 'there stoops on our path, in storm and shade, the frequent night,' as earth grows darker, and life becomes greyer and more sombre, and verges to its eventide the pillar blazes brighter before the weeping eye, and draws nearer to the lonely heart. We have a God who manifests Himself in the pillar of cloud by day, and in flaming fire by night.

II. Note the guidance of the pillar.

When it lifts the camp marches; when it glides down and lies motionless the march is stopped, and the tents are pitched. The main point which is dwelt upon in this description of the God-guided pilgrimage of the wandering people is the absolute uncertainty in which they were kept as to the duration of their encampment, and as to the time and circumstances of their march. Sometimes the cloud tarried upon the Tabernacle many days; sometimes for a night only; sometimes it lifted in the night. 'Whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed. Or whether it were two days, or a month, or a year that the cloud tarried upon the Tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not: but when it was taken up they journeyed.' So never, from moment to moment, did they know when the moving cloud might settle, or the resting cloud might soar. Therefore, absolute uncertainty as to the next stage was visibly represented before them by that hovering guide which determined everything, and concerning whose next movement they knew absolutely nothing.

Is not that all true about us? We have no guiding cloud like this. So much the better. Have we not a more real guide? God guides us by circumstances, God guides us by His word, God guides us by His Spirit, speaking through our common-sense and in our understandings, and, most of all, God guides us by that dear Son of His, in whom is the fire and round whom is the cloud. And perhaps we may even suppose that our Lord implies some allusion to this very symbol in His own great words, 'I am the Light of the world. He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.' For the conception of 'following' the light seems to make it plain that our Lord's image is not that of the sun in the heavens, or any such supernal light, but that of some light which comes near enough to a man to move before him, and behind which he can march. So, I think, that Christ Himself laid His hand upon this ancient symbol, and in these great words said in effect, 'I am that which it only shadowed and foretold.' At all events, whether in them He was pointing to our text or no, we must feel that He is the reality which was expressed by this outward symbol. And no man who can say, 'Jesus Christ is the Captain of my salvation, and after His pattern I march; at the pointing of His guiding finger I move; and in His footsteps, He being my helper, I try to tread,' need feel or fancy that any possible pillar, floating before the dullest eye, was a better, surer, or diviner guide than he possesses. They whom Christ guides want none other for leader, pattern, counsellor, companion, reward. This Christ is our Christ 'for ever and ever, He will be our guide even unto death' and beyond it. The pillar that we follow, which will glow with the ruddy flame of love in the darkest hours of life—blessed be His name!—will glide in front of us through the 'valley of the shadow of death,' brightest then when the murky midnight is blackest. Nor will the pillar which guides us cease to blaze, as did the guide of the desert march, when Jordan has been crossed. It will still move before us on paths of continuous and ever-increasing approach to infinite perfection. They who here follow Christ afar off and with faltering steps shall there 'follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.'

In like manner, the same absolute uncertainty which was intended to keep the Israelites (though it failed often to do so) in the attitude of constant dependence, is the condition in which we all have to live, though we mask it from ourselves. That we do not know what lies before us is a commonplace. The same long tracts of monotonous continuance in the same place and doing the same duties befall us that befell these men. Years pass, and the pillar spreads itself out, a defence above the unmoving sanctuary. And then, all in a flash, when we are least thinking of change, it gathers itself together, is a pillar again, shoots upwards, and moves forwards; and it is for us to go after it. And so our lives are shuttlecocked between uniform sameness which may become mechanical monotony, and agitation by change which may make us lose our hold of fixed principles and calm faith, unless we recognise that the continuance and the change are alike the will of the guiding God, whose will is signified by the stationary or moving pillar.

III. That leads me to the last thing that I would note—viz. the docile following of the Guide.

In the context, the writer does not seem to be able to get away from the thought that whatever the pillar indicated, immediate prompt obedience followed. He says so over and over and over again. 'As long as the cloud abode they rested, and when the cloud tarried long they journeyed not'; and 'when the cloud was a few days on the Tabernacle they abode'; and 'according to the commandment they journeyed'; and 'when the cloud abode until the morning they journeyed': and 'whether it were two days, or a month, or a year that the cloud tarried they journeyed not, but abode in their tents.' So, after he has reiterated the thing half a dozen times or more, he finishes by putting it all again in one verse, as the last impression which he would leave from the whole narrative—'at the commandment of the Lord they rested in their tents, and at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed.' Obedience was prompt; whensoever and for whatsoever the signal was given, the men were ready. In the night, after they had had their tents pitched for a long period, when only the watchers' eyes were open, the pillar lifts, and in an instant the alarm is given, and all the camp is in a bustle. That is what we have to set before us as the type of our lives. We are to be as ready for every indication of God's will as they were. The peace and blessedness of our lives largely depend on our being eager to obey, and therefore quick to perceive, the slightest sign of motion in the resting, or of rest in the moving, pillar which regulates our march and our encamping.

What do we need in order to cultivate and keep such a disposition? We need perpetual watchfulness lest the pillar should lift unnoticed. When Nelson was second in command at Copenhagen, the admiral in command of the fleet hoisted the signal for recall, and Nelson put his telescope to his blind eye and said, 'I do not see it.' That is very like what we are tempted to do. When the signal for unpleasant duties that we would gladly get out of is hoisted, we are very apt to put the telescope to the blind eye, and pretend to ourselves that we do not see the fluttering flags. We need still more to keep our wills in absolute suspense, if His will has not declared itself. Do not let us be in a hurry to run before God. When the

Israelites were crossing the Jordan, they were told to leave a great space between themselves and the guiding ark, that they might know how to go, because they had 'not passed that way heretofore.' Impatient hurrying at God's heels is apt to lead us astray. Let Him get well in front, that you may be quite sure which way He desires you to go, before you go. And if you are not sure which way He desires you to go, be sure that He does not at that moment desire you to go anywhere.

We need to hold the present with a slack hand, so as to be ready to fold our tents and take to the road, if God will. We must not reckon on continuance, nor strike our roots so deep that it needs a hurricane to remove us. To those who set their gaze on Christ, no present, from which He wishes them to remove, can be so good for them as the new conditions into which He would have them pass. It is hard to leave the spot, though it be in the desert, where we have so long encamped that it has come to feel like home. We may look with regret on the circle of black ashes on the sand where our little fire glinted cheerily, and our feet may ache, and our hearts ache more, as we begin our tramp once again, but we must set ourselves to meet the God-appointed change cheerfully, in the confidence that nothing will be left behind which it is not good to lose, nor anything met which does not bring a blessing, however its first aspect may be harsh or sad.

We need, too, to cultivate the habit of prompt obedience. It is usually reluctance which puts the drag on. Slow obedience is often the germ of incipient disobedience. In matters of prudence and of intellect, second thoughts are better than first, and third thoughts, which often come back to first ones, better than second; but in matters of duty, first thoughts are generally best. They are the instinctive response of conscience to the voice of God, while second thoughts are too often the objections of disinclination, or sloth, or cowardice. It is easiest to do our duty when we are at first sure of it. It then comes with an impelling power which carries us over obstacles as on the crest of a wave, while hesitation and delay leave us stranded in shoal water. If we would follow the pillar, we must follow it at once.

A heart that waits and watches for God's direction, that uses common-sense as well as faith to unravel small and great perplexities, and is willing to sit loose to the present, however pleasant, in order that it may not miss the indications which say, 'Arise, this is not your rest,' fulfils the conditions on which, if we keep them, we may be sure that He will guide us by the right way, and bring us at last to 'the city of habitation.'

HOBAB

'And Moses said unto Hobab . . . Come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.'—NUM. x. 29.

THERE is some doubt with regard to the identity of this Hobab. Probably he was a man of about the same age as Moses, his brother-in-law, and a son of Jethro, a wily Kenite, a Bedouin Arab. Moses begs him to join himself to his motley company, and to be to him in the wilderness 'instead of eyes.' What did Moses want a man for, when he had the cloud? What do we want common-sense for, when we have God's

Spirit? What do we want experience and counsel for, when we have divine guidance promised to us? The two things work in together. The cloud led the march, but it was very well to have a man that knew all about the oases and the wells, the situation of which was known only to the desert-born tribes, and who could teach the helpless slaves from Goshen the secrets of camp life. So Moses pressed Hobab to change his position, to break with his past, and to launch himself into an altogether new and untried sort of life.

And what does he plead with him as the reason? 'We will do thee good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.' Probably Hobab looked rather shy at the security, for I suppose he was no worshipper of Jehovah, and he said, 'No; I had rather go home to my own people and my own kindred and my father's house where I fit in, and keep to my own ways, and have something a little more definite to lay hold of than your promise, or the promise of your Jehovah that lies behind it. These are not solid, and I am going back to my tribe.' But Moses pressed and he at last consented, and the following verses suggest that the arrangement was made satisfactorily, and that the journeyings began prosperously. In the Book of Judges we find traces of the presence of Hobab's descendants as incorporated among the people of Israel. One of them came to be somebody, the Jael who struck the tent-peg through the temples of the sleeping Sisera, for she is called 'the wife of Heber the *Kenite*.' Probably, then, in some sense Hobab must have become a worshipper of Jehovah, and have cast in his lot with his brother-in-law and his people. I do not set Hobab up as a shining example. We do not know much about his religion. But it seems to me that this little glimpse into a long-forgotten and unimportant life may teach us two or three things about the venture of faith, the life of faith, and the reward of faith.

I. The venture of faith.

I have already said that Hobab had nothing in the world to trust to except Moses' word, and Moses' report of God's Word. 'We will do you good; God has said that He will do good to us, and you shall have your share in it.' It was a grave thing, and, in many circumstances, would have been a supremely foolish thing, credulous to the verge of insanity, to risk all upon the mere promise of one in Moses' position, who had so little in his own power with which to fulfil the promise; and who referred him to an unseen divinity, somewhere or other; and so drew bills upon heaven and futurity, and did not feel himself at all bound to pay them when they fell due, unless God should give him the cash to do it with. But Hobab took the plunge, he ventured all upon these two promises—Moses' word, and God's word that underlay it.

Now that is just what we have to do. For, after all talking about reasons for belief, and evidences of religion, and all the rest of it, it all comes to this at last—will you risk everything on Jesus Christ's bare word? There are plenty of reasons for doing so, but what I wish to bring out is this, that the living heart and root of true Christianity is neither more nor less than the absolute and utter reliance upon nothing else but Christ, and therefore on His word. He did not even condescend to give reasons for that reliance, for His most solemn assurance was just this, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you.' That is as much as to say, 'If you do not see in Me, without any more argument, reason enough for believing Me, you do not see Me at all

Christ did not argue—He asserted, and in default of all other proof, if I might venture to say so, He put His own personality into the scales and said, 'There, that will outweigh everything.' So no wonder that 'they were astonished at His doctrine,'—not so much at the substance of it as at the tone of it, 'for He taught them *with authority*.'

But what right had He to teach them with authority? What right has He to present Himself there in front of us and proclaim, 'I say unto you, and there is an end of it'? The heart and essence of Christian faith is doing, in a far sublimer fashion, precisely what this wild Arab did, when he uprooted himself from the conditions in which his life had grown up, and flung himself into an unknown future, on bare trust in a bare word. Jesus Christ asks us to do the same by Him. Whether His word comes to us revealing, or commanding, or promising, it is absolute, and, for His true followers, ends all controversy, all hesitation, all reluctance. When He commands it is ours to obey and live. And when He promises it is for us to twine all the tendrils of our expectations round that faithful word, and by faith to make 'the anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast.' The venture of faith takes a *word* for the most solid thing in the universe, and the Incarnate Word of God for the basis of all our hope, the authority for all our conduct, 'the Master-light of all our seeing.'

II. Hobab suggests to us, secondly—

The sort of life that follows the venture of faith.

The hindrances to his joining Moses were plainly put by himself. He said in effect, 'I will not come; I will depart to mine own land and to my kindred. Why should I attach myself to a horde of strangers, and go wandering about the desert for the rest of my life, looking out for encampments for them, when I can return to where I have been all my days; and be surrounded by the familiar atmosphere of friends and relatives?' But he bethought himself that there was a nobler life to live than that, and because he was stirred by the impulse of reliance on Moses and his promise, and perhaps by some germ of reliance on Moses' God, he finally said, 'The die is cast. I choose my side. I will break with the past. I turn my back on kindred and home. Here I draw a broad line across the page, and begin over again in an altogether new kind of life. I identify myself with these wanderers; sharing their fortunes, hoping to share their prosperity, and taking their God for my God.' He had perhaps not been a nomad before, for there still are permanent settlements as well as nomad encampments in Arabia, as there were in those days, and he and his relatives, from the few facts that we know of them, seem to have had a fixed home, with a very narrow zone of wandering round it. So Hobab, an old man probably, if he was anything like the age of his connection by marriage, Moses, who was eighty at this time, makes up his mind to begin a new career.

Now that is what we have to do. If we have faith in Christ and His promise, we shall not say, 'I am going back to my kindred and to my home.' We shall be prepared to accept the conditions of a wanderer's life. We shall recognise and feel, far more than we ever have done, that we are indeed 'pilgrims and sojourners' here. Dear Christian friends, we have no business to call ourselves Christ's men, unless the very characteristic of our lives is that we are drawn ever forward by the prospect of future good, and unless that future is a great deal more solid and more operative upon us, and tells more on our lives, than this intrusive, solid-seeming present that thrusts itself between us and our true home. That is a sure saying. The Christian obligation to live a life of detachment, even while diligent in duty, is not to be brushed aside as pulpit rhetoric and exaggeration, but it is the plainest teaching of the New Testament. I wish it was a little more exemplified in the daily life of the people who call themselves Christians.

If I am not living for the unseen and the future, what right have I to say that I am Christ's at all? If the shadows are more than the substance to me; if this condensed vapour and fog that we call reality has not been to our apprehension thinned away into the unsubstantial mist that it is, what have the principles of Christianity done for us, and what worth is Christ's word to us? If I believe Him, the world is—I do not say, as the sentimental poet put it, 'but a fleeting show, for man's illusion given';—but as Paul puts it, a glass which may either reveal or obscure the realities beyond; and according as we look at, or look through, 'the things seen and temporal,' do we see, or miss, 'the things unseen and eternal.' So, then, the life of faith has for its essential characteristic—because it is a life of reliance on Christ's bare word—that future good is consciously its supreme aim. That will detach us, as it did Hobab, from home and kindred, and make us feel that we are 'pilgrims and sojourners.'

III. Lastly, our story suggests to us—

The rewards of faith.

'Come with us,' says Moses; 'we are journeying unto the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you. Come thou with us, and we will do thee what goodness the Lord shall do unto us.' He went, and neither he nor Moses ever saw the land, or at least never set their feet on it. Moses saw it from Pisgah, but probably Hobab did not even get so much as that.

So he had all his tramping through the wilderness, and all his work, for nothing, had he? Had he not better have gone back to Midian, and made use of the present reality, than followed a will-of-the-wisp that led him into a bog, if he got none of the good that he set out expecting to get? Then, did he make a mistake? Would he have been a wiser man if he had stuck to his first refusal? Surely not. It seems to me that the very fact of this great promise being given to this old —dare I call Hobab a 'saint'?—to this old saint, and never being fulfilled at all in this world, compels us to believe that there was some gleam of hope, and of certainty, of a future life, even in these earliest days of dim and partial revelation.

To me it is very illuminative, and very beautiful, that the dying Jacob bursts in his song into a sudden exclamation, 'I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord!' It is as if he had felt that all his life long he had been looking for what had never come, and that it could not be that God was going to let him go down to the grave and never grasp the good that he had been waiting for all his days. We may apply substantially the same thoughts to Hobab, and to all his like, and may turn them to our own use, and argue that the imperfections of the consequences of our faith here on earth are themselves evidences of a future, where all that Christ has said shall be more than fulfilled, and no man will be able to say, 'Thou didst send me out, deluding me with promises which have all gone to water and have failed.'

Hobab dying there in the desert had made the right choice, and if we will trust ourselves to Christ and His faithful word, and, trusting to Him, will feel that we are detached from the present and that it is but as the shadow of a cloud, whatever there may be wanting in the results of our faith here on earth, there will be nothing wanting in its results at the last. Hobab did not regret his venture, and no man ever ventures his faith on Christ and is disappointed. 'He that believeth shall not be confounded.'

THE HALLOWING OF WORK AND OF REST

'And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, Lord, and let Thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate Thee flee before Thee. 36. And when it rested, he said, Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel.'—NUM. x. 35, 36.

THE picture suggested by this text is a very striking and vivid one. We see the bustle of the morning's breaking up of the encampment of Israel. The pillar of cloud, which had lain diffused and motionless over the Tabernacle, gathers itself together into an upright shaft, and moves, a dark blot against the glittering blue sky, the sunshine masking its central fire, to the front of the encampment. Then the priests take up the ark, the symbol of the divine Presence, and fall into place behind the guiding pillar. Then come the stir of the ordering of the ranks, and a moment's pause, during which the leader lifts his voice—'Rise, Lord, and let Thine enemies be scattered, and let them that hate Thee flee before Thee.' Then, with braced resolve and confident hearts, the tribes set forward on the day's march.

Long after those desert days a psalmist laid hold of the old prayer and offered it, as not antiquated yet by the thousand years that had intervened. 'Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered,' prayed one of the later psalmists; 'let them that hate Him flee before Him.' We, too, in circumstances so different, may take up the immortal though ancient words, on which no dimming rust of antiquity has encrusted itself, and may, at the beginnings and the endings of all our efforts and of each of our days, and at the beginning and ending of life itself, offer this old prayer—the prayer which asked for a divine presence in the incipiency of our efforts, and the prayer which asked for a divine presence in the completion of our work and in the rest that remaineth.

I. So, then, if we put these two petitions together, I think we shall see in them first, a pattern of that realisation of, and aspiration after, the divine Presence, which ought to fill all our lives.

'Rise, Lord, let Thine enemies be scattered.'

But was not that moving pillar the token that God had risen? And was not the psalmist who reiterated Moses' prayer asking for what had been done before he asked it? Was not the ark the symbol of the divine Presence, and was not its movement after the pillar a pledge to the whole host of Israel that the petition which they were offering, through their leader's lips, was granted ere it was offered? Yes. And yet the present God would not manifest His Presence except in response to the desire of His servants; and just because the ark was the symbol, and that moving column was the guarantee of God's being with the host as their defence, therefore there rose up with confidence this prayer, 'Rise, Lord, and let Thine enemies be scattered.'

That twofold attitude, the realisation of, and therefore the aspiration after, the divine gifts, which are given before they are desired, but are not appropriated and brought into operation in our lives unless they are desired, is precisely the paradox of the Christian life. Having, we long for, and longing, we have, and because we possess God we pray, 'Oh! that we might possess Thee.' The more we long, the more we receive. But unless He gave Himself in anticipation of our longing, there would be neither longing nor reception. Only on condition of our desiring to have Him does He flow into our lives, victorious and strength-giving, and the more we experience that omnipotent might and calming, guiding nearness, the more assuredly we shall long for it.

Let us then, dear brethren, blend these two things together, for indeed they are inseparable one from the other, and there can be no real experience in any depth of the one of them without the other. Blessed be God! there need be no long interval of waiting between sowing the seed of supplication and reaping the harvest of fruition. That process of growth and reaping goes on with instantaneous rapidity. 'Before they call I will answer,' for pillar and ark were there ere Moses opened his lips; and 'while they are yet speaking I will hear,' for, in response to the cry, the host moved triumphantly, guarded through the wilderness. So it may be, and ought to be, with each of us.

In like manner, coupling these two petitions together, and taking them as unitedly covering the whole field of life in their great antitheses of work and rest, effort and accomplishment, beginning and ending, morning and evening, we may say that here is an example, to be appropriated in our own lives, of that continuous longing and realisation which will encircle all life as with a golden ring, and make every part of it uniform and blessed. To begin, continue, and end with God is the secret of joyful beginning, of patient continuance, and of triumphant ending. There is no reason in heaven, though there are hosts of excuses on earth, why there should not be, in the case of each of us, an absolutely continuous and uninterrupted sense of being with God. O brethren! that is a stage of Christian experience high above the one on which most of us stand. But that is our fault, and not the necessity of our condition. Let us lay this to heart, that it is possible to have the pillar always guiding our march, and possible to have it stretching, calm and motionless, over all our hours of rest.

II. Now, if, turning from the lessons to be drawn from these two petitions, taken in conjunction, we look at them separately, we may say that we have here an example of the spirit in which we should set ourselves, day by day, and at each new epoch and beginning, be it greater or smaller, to every task.

There are truths that underlie that first prayer, 'Rise up, Lord, and let Thine enemies be scattered,' which are of perennial validity, and apply to us as truly as to these warriors of God in the wilderness long centuries ago. The first of them is that the divine Presence is the source of all energy, and of successful endeavour after, and accomplishment of, any duty. The second of them is that that presence is, as I have been saying, granted, in its operative power, only on condition of its being sought. And the third of them is that I have a right to identify my enemies with God's only on condition that I have made His cause mine. When Moses prayed, 'Let Thine enemies be scattered,' he meant by these the hostile nomad tribes that might ring Israel round, and come down like a sandstorm upon them at any moment. What right had he to suppose that the people whose lances and swords threatened the motley host that he was leading through the wilderness were God's enemies? Only this right, that his host had consented to be God's soldiers, and that they having thus made His enemies theirs, He, on His part, was sure to make their enemies His. We are often tempted to identify our foes with God's, without having taken the preliminary step of having so yielded ourselves to be His servants and instruments for carrying forward His will, as that our own wills have become a vanishing quantity, or rather have been ennobled and greatened in proportion as they have been moulded in submission to His. We must take God's cause for ours, in all the various aspects of that phrase. And that means, first of all, that we make our own perfecting into the likeness of Jesus Christ the main aim of our own lives and efforts. It means, further, the putting ourselves bravely and manfully on the side of right and truth and justice, in all their forms. Above all, it means that we give ourselves to be God's instruments in carrying on His great purposes for the salvation of the world through Jesus Christ. If we do these things, whatever obstacles may arise in our paths, we may be sure that these are God's antagonists, because they are antagonists to God's work in and by us.

Only in so far as they are such, can you pray, 'Let them flee before Thee!' Many of the things that we call our enemies come to us disguised, and are mistaken by our superficial sight, and we do not know that they are friends. 'All things work together for good to them that love God.' And, when we desire His Presence, the hindrances to doing His will—which are the only real enemies that we have to fight—will melt away before His power, 'as wax melteth' before the ardours of the fire; and, for the rest, the distresses, the difficulties, the sorrows, and all the other things that we so often think are our foes, we shall find out to have been our friends. Make God's cause yours, and He will make your cause His.

That applies to the great things of life, and to the little things. I begin my day's work some morning, perhaps wearied, perhaps annoyed with a multiplicity of trifles which seem too small to bring great principles to bear upon them. But do you not think there would be a strange change wrought in the petty annoyances of every day, and in the small trifles of which all our lives, of whatever texture they are, must largely be composed, if we began each day and each task with that old prayer, 'Rise, Lord, and let Thine enemies be scattered'? Do you not think there would come a quiet into our hearts, and a victorious peace to which we are too much strangers? If we carried the assurance that there is One that fights for us, into the trifles as well as into the sore struggles of our lives, we should have peace and victory. Most of us will not have many large occasions of trial and conflict in our career; and, if God's fighting for us is not available in regard to the small annoyances of home and daily life, I know not for what it is available. 'Many littles make a mickle,' and there are more deaths in skirmishes than in the field of a pitched battle. More Christian people lose their hold of God, their sense of His presence, and are beaten accordingly, by reason of the little enemies that come down on them, like a cloud of gnats in a summer evening, than are defeated by the shock of a great assault or a great temptation, which calls out their strength, and sends them to their knees to ask for help from God.

So we may learn from this prayer the spirit of expectance of victory which is not presumption, and of consecration, which alone will enable us to pass through life victorious. 'Be of good cheer,' said the Master, as if in answer to this prayer in its Christian form—'I have overcome the world.' We turn to the helmed and sworded Figure that stands mysteriously beside us whilst we are all unaware of His coming, and the swift question that Joshua put rises to our lips, 'Art Thou for us or for our adversaries?' The reply comes, 'Nay! but as Captain of the Lord's host am I come up.' That is Christ's answer to the prayer, 'Rise, Lord, let Thine enemies be scattered.'

III. Lastly, we have here a pattern of the temper for hours of repose.

'When the ark rested, he said, "Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel."' As I said at the beginning of these remarks, the pillar of cloud seems to have taken two forms, braced together upright when it moved, diffused and stretched as a shelter and a covering over the host of Israel when it and they were at rest. In like manner, that divine Presence is Protean in its forms, and takes all shapes, according to the moment's necessities of the Christian trusting heart. When we are to brace ourselves for the march it condenses itself into an upright and moving guide. When we lay ourselves down with relaxed muscles for repose, it softly expands itself and 'covers our head' in the hours of rest, 'as in the day of battle.'

Ah! brother. we have more need of God in times of repose than in times of effort. It is harder to realise His Presence in the brief hours of relaxation than even in the many hours of strenuous toil. Every one who goes for a holiday knows that. You have only to look at the sort of amusements that most people fly to when they have not anything to do, to see that there is quite as much, if not more, peril to communion of soul with God in times when the whole nature is somewhat relaxed, and the strings are loosened, like those of a violin screwed down a turn or two of the peg, than there is in times of work.

So let us take special care of our hours of repose, and be quite sure that they are so spent as that we can ask when the day's work is done, and we have come to slippered ease, in preparation for nightly rest, 'Return, O Lord, unto Thy waiting servant.' Work without God unfits for rest with Him. Rest without God unfits for work for Him.

We may take these two petitions as tests of the allowableness of any occupation, or of any relaxation. Dare I ask Him to come with me into that field of work? If I dare not, it is no place for me. Dare I ask Him to come with me into this other chamber of rest? If I dare not, I had better never cross its threshold. Take these two prayers, and where you cannot pray them, do not risk yourself.

But the highest form of the contrast between the two waits still to be realised. For life as a whole is a fight, and beyond it there is the 'rest that remaineth,' where there will be not merely God's 'return unto the thousands of Israel,' but the realisation of His fuller presence, and of deeper rest, which shall be wondrously associated with more intense work, though in that work there will be no conflict. The two petitions will flow together then, for whilst we labour we shall rest; and whilst we rest we shall labour, according to the great sayings, 'they rest from their labours,' and yet 'they rest not day nor night.'

MOSES DESPONDENT

'I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me.
Num. xi. 14.

Detail the circumstances.

The leader speaks the truth in his despondency. He is pressed with the feeling of his incapacity for his work. We may take his words here as teaching us what men need in him who is to be their guide, and how impossible it is to find what they need in mere men.

I. What men need in their guide.

These Israelites were wandering in the wilderness; they were without natural supplies for their daily necessities; they had a long hard journey before them, an unknown road, at the terminus of which was a land where they should rest. We have precisely the same necessities as those which Moses despairingly said that they had.

Like them, we wander hungry, and need a Leader who can satisfy our desires and evermore give us bread for our souls even more than for our bodies. We need One to whom we can 'weep,' as the Israelites did to Moses, and not weep in vain. We need One who can do for us what Moses felt that the Israelites needed, and that he could not give them, when he almost indignantly put to God the despairing question, 'Can I carry them in my bosom as a nursing father beareth the sucking child?' Our weakness, our ignorance, our heart-hunger, cry out for One who can 'bear all this people alone,' who in his single Self has resources of strength, wisdom, and sufficiency to meet not only the wants of one soul but those of the world. For He who can satisfy the poorest single soul must be able to satisfy all men.

II. The impossibility of finding this in men.

Moses' experience here is that of all leaders and great men. He is overwhelmed with the work; feels his own utter impotence; has himself to be strengthened; loathes his work; longs for release from it. See how he confesses

His human dependence.

His incapacity to do and be what is needed.

His impatience with the people.

His longing to be rid of it all.

That is a true picture of the experience of the best of men—a true picture of the limitations of the noblest leaders.

But it is not only the leaders who confess their inadequacy, but the followers feel it, for even the most enthusiastic of them come sooner or later to find that their Oracle had not learned all wisdom, nor was fit to be taken as sole guide, much less as sole defence or satisfaction. He who looks to find all that he needs in men must take many men to find it, and no multiplicity of men will bring him what he seeks. The Milky Way is no substitute for the sun. Our hearts cry out for One great light, for One spacious home. Endless strings of pearls do not reach the preciousness of One pearl of price.

III. The failures of human leaders prophesy the true Leader.

Moses was prophetic of Christ by his failures as by his successes. He could not do what the people clamoured to have done, and what he in the mood of despair in which the text shows him, sadly owned that he could not. In that very confession he becomes an unconscious prophet. For that he should have so vividly set forth the qualifications of a leader of men, as defined by the people's cries, and should have so bitterly felt his incapacity to supply them, is a witness, if there is a God at all, that somewhere the needed Ideal will be realised in 'a Leader and Commander of the people,' God-sent and 'worthy of more glory than Moses.'

The best service that all human leaders, helpers or lovers, can do us, is to confess their own insufficiency, and to point us to Jesus.

All that men need is found in Him and in Him alone. All that men have failed, and must always fail, to be, He is. Those eyes are blessed that 'see no man any more save Jesus only.' We need One who can satisfy our desires and fill our hungry souls, and Jesus speaks a promise, confirmed by the experience of all who have tested it when He declares: 'He that cometh unto Me shall never hunger.' We need One who will dry our tears, and Jesus, when He says 'Weep not,' wipes them away and stanches their sources, giving 'the oil of joy for mourning.' We need One who can hold us up in our journey, and minister strength to fainting hearts and vigour to weary feet, and Jesus 'strengthens us with might in the inner man.' We need One who will bring us to the promised land of rest, and Jesus brings many sons to glory, and wills that they be 'with Him where He is.' So let us turn away from the multiplicity of human insufficiencies to Him who is our one only help and hope, because He is all-sufficient and eternal.

AFRAID OF GIANTS

'And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said unto them, Get you up this way southward, and go up into the mountain; 18. And see the land, what it is; and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many; 19. And what the land is that they dwell in, whether it be good or bad; and what cities they be that they dwell in, whether in tents, or in strong holds; 20. And what the land is, whether it be fat or lean, whether there be wood therein, or not. And be ye of good courage, and bring of the fruit of the land. Now the time was the time of the firstripe grapes. 21. So they went up, and searched the land from the wilderness of Zin unto Rehob, as men come to Hamath. 22. And they ascended by the south, and came unto Hebron; where Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the children of Anak, were. (Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) 23. And they came unto the brook of Eshcol, and cut down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two upon a staff; and they brought of the pomegranates, and of the figs. 24. The place was called the brook Eshcol, because of the cluster of grapes which the children of Israel cut down from thence. 25. And they returned from searching of the land after forty days. 26. And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land. 27. And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it. 28. Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and, moreover, we saw the children of Anak there. 29. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south; and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in the mountains; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan. 30. And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it. 31. But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we. 32. And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. 33. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.'—NUM. xiii. 17-33.

WE stand here on the edge of the Promised Land. The discussion of the true site of Kadesh need not concern us now. Wherever it was, the wanderers had the end of their desert journey within sight; one bold push forward, and their feet would tread on their inheritance. But, as is so often the case, courage oozed out at the decisive moment, and cowardice, disguised as prudence, called for 'further information,'—that cuckoo-cry of the faint-hearted. There are three steps in this narrative: the despatch of the explorers, their expedition, and the two reports brought back.

I. We have the despatch and instructions of the explorers. A comparison with Deuteronomy i. shows that the project of sending the spies originated in the people's terror at the near prospect of the fighting which they had known to be impending ever since they left Egypt. Faith finds that nearness diminishes dangers, but sense sees them grow as they approach. The people answered Moses' brave words summoning them to the struggle with this feeble petition for an investigation. They did not honestly say that they were alarmed, but defined the scope of the exploring party's mission as simply to 'bring us word again of the way by which we must go up, and the cities into which we shall come.' Had they not the pillar blazing there above them to tell them that? The request was not fathomed in its true faithlessness by Moses, who thought it reasonable and yielded. So far Deuteronomy goes; but this narrative puts another colour on the mission, representing it as the consequence of God's command. The most eager discoverer of discrepancies in the component parts of the Pentateuch need not press this one into his service, for both sides may be true: the one representing the human feebleness which originated the wish; the other, the divine compliance with the desire, in order to disclose the unbelief which unfitted the people for the impending struggle, and to educate them by letting them have their foolish way, and taste its bitter results. Putting the two accounts together, we get, not a contradiction, but a complete view, which teaches a large truth as to God's dealings; namely, that He often lovingly lets us have our own way to show us by the issues that His is better, and that daring, which is obedience, is the true prudence.

The instructions given to the explorers turn on two points: the eligibility of the country for settlement, and the military strength of its inhabitants. They alternate in a very graphic way from the one of these to the other, beginning, in verse 18, with the land, and immediately going on to the numbers and power of the inhabitants; then harking back again, in verse 19, to the fertility of the land, and passing again to the capacity of the cities to resist attack; and finishing up, in verse 20, with the land once more, both arable and forest. The same double thought colours the parting exhortation to 'be bold,' and to 'bring of the produce of the land.' Now the people knew already both points which the spies were despatched to find out. Over and over again, in Egypt, in the march, and at Sinai, they had been told that the land was 'flowing with milk and honey,' and had been assured of its conquest. What more did they want? Nothing, if they had believed God. Nothing, if they had been all saints,—which they were not. Their fears were very natural. A great deal might be said in favour of their wish to have accurate information. But it is a bad sign when faith, or rather unbelief, sends out sense to be its scout, and when we think to verify God's words by men's confirmation. Not to believe Him unless a jury of twelve of ourselves says the same thing, is surely much the same as not believing Him at all; for it is not He, but they, whom we believe after all.

There is no need to be too hard on the people. They were a mob of slaves, whose manhood had been eaten out by four centuries of sluggish comfort, and latterly crushed by oppression. So far as we know, Abraham's midnight surprise of the Eastern kings was the solitary bit of fighting in the national history thus far; and it is not wonderful that, with such a past, they should have shrunk from the prospect of bloodshed, and caught at any excuse for delay at least, even if not for escape. 'We have all of us one human heart,' and these cowards were no monsters, but average men, who did very much what average men, professing to be Christians, do every day, and for doing get praised for prudence by other average professing Christians. How many of us, when brought right up to some task involving difficulty or danger, but unmistakably laid on us by God, shelter our distrustful fears under the fair pretext of 'knowing a little more about it first,' and shake wise heads over rashness which takes God at His word, and thinks that it knows enough when it knows what He wills?

II. We have the exploration (verses 21-25). The account of it is arranged on a plan common in the Old Testament narratives, the observation of which would, in many places, remove difficulties which have led to extraordinary hypotheses. Verse 21 gives a general summary of what is then taken up, and told in more detail. It indicates the completeness of the exploration by giving its extreme southern and northern points, the desert of Zin being probably the present depression called the Arabah, and 'Rehob as men come to Hamath' being probably near the northern Dan, on the way to Hamath, which lay in the valley between the Lebanon and the Anti-Lebanon. The account then begins over again, and tells how the spies went up into 'the South.' The Revised Version has done wisely in printing this word with a capital, and thereby showing that it is not merely the name of a cardinal point, but of a district. It literally means 'the dry,' and is applied to the arid stretch of land between the more cultivated southern parts of Canaan and the northern portion of the desert which runs down to Sinai. It is a great chalky plateau, and might almost be called a steppe or prairie. Passing through this, the explorers next would come to Hebron, the first town of importance, beside which Abraham had lived, and where the graves of their ancestors were. But they were in no mood for remembering such old stories. Living Anaks were much more real to them than dead patriarchs. So the only thing mentioned, besides the antiquity of the city, is the presence in it of these giants. They were probably the relics of the aboriginal inhabitants, and some strain of their blood survived till late days. They seem to have expelled the Hittites, who held Mamre, or Hebron, in Abraham's time. Their name is said to mean 'long-necked,' and the three names in our lesson are probably tribal, and not personal, names. The whole march northward and back again comes in between verses 22 and 23; for Eshcol was close to Hebron, and the spies would not encumber themselves with the bunch of grapes on their northward march. The details of the exploration are given more fully in the spies' report, which shows that they had gone up north from Hebron, through the hills, and possibly came back by the valley of the Jordan. At any rate, they made good speed, and must have done some bold and hard marching, to cover the ground out and back in six weeks. So they returned with their pomegranates and figs, and a great bunch of the grapes for which the valley identified with Eshcol is still famous, swinging on a pole,—the easiest way of carrying it without injury.

III. We have next the two reports. The explorers are received in a full assembly of the people, and begin their story with an object-lesson, producing the great grape cluster and the other spoils. But while honesty compelled the acknowledgment of the fertility of the land, cowardice slurred that over as lightly as might be, and went on to dilate on the terrors of the giants and the strength of the cities, and the crowded population that held every corner of the country. Truly, the eye sees what it brings with it. They really had gone to look for dangers, and of course they found them. Whatever Moses might lay down in his instructions, they had been sent by the people to bring back reasons for not attempting the conquest, and so they curtly and coldly admit the fertility of the soil, and fling down the fruit for inspection as undeniably grown there, but they tell their real mind with a great 'nevertheless.' Their report is, no doubt, quite accurate. The cities were, no doubt, some of them walled, and to eyes accustomed to the desert, very great; and there were, no doubt, Anaks at Hebron, at any rate, and the 'spies' had got the names of the various races and their territories correctly. As to these, we need only notice that the Hittites were an outlying branch of the great nation, which recent research has discovered, as we might say, the importance and extent of which we scarcely yet know; that the Jebusites held Jerusalem till David's time; that the 'Amorites,' or 'Highlanders,' occupied the central block of mountainous country in conjunction with the two preceding tribes; and that the 'Canaanites,' or 'Lowlanders,' held the lowlands east and west of that hilly nucleus, namely, the deep gorge of the Jordan, and the strip of maritime plain. A very accurate report may be very one-sided. The spies were not the last people who, being sent out to bring home facts, managed to convey very decided opinions without expressing any. A grudging and short admission to begin with, the force of which is immediately broken by sombre and minute painting of difficulty and danger, is more powerful as a deterrent than any dissuasive. It sounds such an unbiassed appeal to common-sense, as if the reporter said, 'There are the facts; we leave you to draw the conclusions.' An 'unvarnished account of the real state of the case,' in which there is not a single misstatement nor exaggeration, may be utterly false by reason of wrong perspective and omission, and, however true, is sure to act as a shower-bath to courage, if it is unaccompanied with a word of cheer. To begin a perilous enterprise without fairly facing its risks and difficulties is folly. To look at *them* only is no less folly, and is the sure precursor of defeat. But when on the one side is God's command, and on the other such doleful discouragements, they are more than folly, they are sin.

It is bracing to turn from the creeping prudence which leaves God out of the account, to the cheery ring of Caleb's sturdy confidence. His was 'a minority report,' signed by only two of the 'Commission.' These two had seen all that the others had, but everything depends on the eyes which look. The others had measured themselves against the trained soldiers and giants, and were in despair. These two measured Amalekites and Anaks against God, and were jubilant. They do not dispute the facts, but they reverse the implied conclusion, because they add the governing fact of God's help. How differently the same facts strike a man who lives by faith, and one who lives by calculation! Israel might be a row of ciphers, but with God at the head they meant something. Caleb's confidence that 'we are well able to overcome' was religious trust, as is plain from God's eulogium on him in the next chapter (Num. xiv. 24). The lessons from it are that faith is the parent of wise courage; that where duty, which is God's voice, points, difficulties must not deter; that when we have God's assurance of support, they are nothing. Caleb was wise to counsel going up to the assault 'at once,' for there is no better cure for fear than action. Old soldiers tell us that the trying time is when waiting to begin the fight. 'The native hue of resolution' gets 'sicklied o'er' with the paleness that comes from hesitation. Am I sure that anything is God's will? Then the sooner I go to work at doing it, the better for myself and for the vigour of my work.

This headstrong rashness, as they thought it, brings up the other 'spies' once more. Notice how the gloomy views are the only ones in their second statement. There is nothing about the fertility of the land, but, instead, we have that enigmatical expression about its 'eating up its inhabitants.' No very satisfactory explanation of this is forthcoming. It evidently means that in some way the land was destructive of its inhabitants, which seems to contradict their former reluctant admission of its fertility. Perhaps in their eagerness to paint it black enough, they did contradict themselves, and try to make out that it was a barren soil, not worth conquering. Fear is not very careful of consistency. Note, too, the exaggerations of terror. 'All the people' are sons of Anak now. The size as well as the number of the giants has grown; 'we were in our own sight as grasshoppers.' No doubt they were gigantic, but fear performed the miracle of adding a cubit to their stature. When the coward hears that 'there is a lion without,'—that is, in the open country,—he immediately concludes, 'I shall be slain in the streets,' where it is not usual for lions to disport themselves.

Thus exaggerated and one-sided is distrust of God's promises. Such a temper is fatal to all noble life or work, and brings about the disasters which it foresees. If these cravens had gone up to fight with men before whom they felt like grasshoppers, of course they would have been beaten; and it was much better that their fears should come out at Kadesh than when committed to the struggle. Therefore God lovingly permitted the mission of the spies, and so brought lurking unbelief to the surface, where it could be dealt with. Let us beware of the one-eyed 'prudence' which sees only the perils in the path of duty and enterprise for God, and is blind to the all-sufficient presence which makes us more than conquerors, when we lean all our weight on it. It is well to see the Anakim in their full formidableness, and to feel that we are 'as grasshoppers in our own sight' and in theirs, if the sight drives us to lift our eyes to Him who 'sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof,' however huge and strong, 'are as grasshoppers.'

WEIGHED, AND FOUND WANTING

'And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept
that night. 2. And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against
Aaron; and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died
in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! 3. And
wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our
wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into
Egypt? 4. And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return
into Egypt. 5. Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of
the congregation of the children of Israel. 6. And Joshua the son of Nun, and
Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their
clothes. 7. And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying,
The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. 8. If
the Lord delight in us, then He will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land
which floweth with milk and honey. 9. Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither
fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed
from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not. 10. But all the congregation

bade stone them with stones. And the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel.'—NUM. xiv. 1-10.

TERROR is more contagious than courage, for a mob is always more prone to base than to noble instincts. The gloomy report of the spies jumped with the humour of the people, and was at once accepted. Its effect was to throw the whole assembly into a paroxysm of panic, which was expressed in the passionate Eastern manner by wild, ungoverned shrieking and tears. What a picture of a frenzied crowd the first verse of this chapter gives! That is not the stuff of which heroes can be made. Weeping endured for a night, but to such weeping there came no morning of joy. When day dawned, the tempest of emotion settled down into sullen determination to give up the prize which hung within reach of a bold hand, ripe and ready to drop. It was one of the moments which come once at least in the lives of nations as of individuals, when a supreme resolve is called for, and when to fall beneath the stern requirement, and refuse a great attempt because of danger, is to pronounce sentence of unworthiness and exclusion on themselves. Not courage only, but belief in God, was tested in this crucial moment, which made a turning-point in the nation's history. Our text brings before us with dramatic vividness and sharpness of contrast, three parties in this decisive hour—the faithless cowards, the faithful four, and the All-seeing presence.

I. Note the faithless cowards. The gravity of the revolt here is partly in its universality, which is emphasised in the narrative at every turn: '*all* the congregation' (v. 1), '*all* the children of Israel,' 'the *whole* congregation' (v. 2), '*all* the assembly of the congregation' (which implies a solemn formal convocation), '*all* the company' (v. 7), '*all* the congregation,' '*all* the children of Israel' (v. 10). It was no sectional discontent, but full-blown and universal rebellion. The narrative draws a distinction between the language addressed to Moses, and the whisperings to one another. Publicly, the unanimous voice suggested the return to Egypt as an alternative for discussion, and put it before Moses; to one another they muttered the proposal, which no man had yet courage to speak out, of choosing a new leader, and going back, whatever became of Moses. That could only mean murder as well as mutiny. The whispers would soon be loud enough.

In the murmurs to Moses, observe the distinct and conscious apostacy from Jehovah. They recognise that God 'has brought' them there, and they slander Him by the assertion that His malignant, deliberate purpose was to kill them all, and make slaves of their wives and children. That was how they read the past, and thought of Him! He had enticed them into His trap, as a hunter might some foolish animal, by dainties strewed along the path, and now they were in the toils, and their only chance of life was to break through. Often, already, had they raised that mad cry—'back to Egypt!' but there had never been such a ring of resolve in it, nor had it come from so many throats, nor had any serious purpose to depose Moses been entertained. If we add the fact that they were now on the very frontier of Canaan, and that the decision now taken was necessarily final, we get the full significance of the incident from the mere secular historian's point of view. But its bearing on the people's relation to Jehovah gives a darker colouring to it. It is not merely faint-hearted shrinking from a great opportunity, but it is wilful and deliberate rejection of His rule, based upon utter distrust of His word. So Scripture treats this event as the typical example of unbelief (Psa. xcv.; Heb. iii. and iv.). So regarded, it presents, as in a mirror, some of the salient characteristics of that master sin. Bad as it is, it is not out of the range of possibility that it should be repeated, and we need the warning to 'take heed lest any of us should fall after the same example of unbelief.'

We may learn from it the essentials of faith and its opposite. The trust which these cowards failed to exercise was reliance on Jehovah, a personal relation to a Person. In externals and contents, their trust was very unlike the New Testament faith, but in object and essence it was identical. They had to trust in Jehovah; we, in 'God manifest in the flesh.' Their creed was much less clear and blessed than ours, but their faith, if they had had it, would have been the same. Faith is not the belief of a creed, whether man-made or God-revealed, but the cleaving to the Person whom the creed makes known. He may be made known more or less perfectly; but the act of the soul, by which we grasp Him, does not vary with the completeness of the revelation. That act was one for 'the world's grey fathers' and for us. In like manner, unbelief is the same black and fatal sin, whatever be the degree of light against which it turns. To depart from the living God is its essence, and that is always rebellion and death.

Note the short memory and churlish unthankfulness of unbelief. It has been often objected to the story of the Exodus, that such extremity of folly as is ascribed to the Israelites is inconceivable in such circumstances. How could men, with all these miracles in mind, and manna falling daily, and the pillar blazing every night, and the roll of Sinai's thunders scarcely out of their ears, behave thus? But any one who has honestly studied his own heart, and known its capacity for neglecting the plainest indications of God's presence, and forgetting the gifts of His love, will believe the story, and see brethren in these Israelites. Miracles were less wonderful to them, because they knew less about nature and its laws. Any miracles constantly renewed become commonplace. Habit takes the wonder out of everything. The heart that does not 'like to retain God in its knowledge' will find easy ways of forgetting Him, and revolting from Him, though the path be strewed with blessings, and tokens of His presence flame on every side. True, it is strange that all the wonders and mercies of the past two years had made no deeper impression on these people's hearts; but if they had not done so, it is not unnatural that they had made so slight an impression on their wills. Their ingratitude and forgetfulness are inexplicable, as all sin is, for its very essence is that it has no sufficient reason. But neither is inconceivable, and both are repeated by us every day.

Note the credulity of unbelief. The word of Jehovah had told them that the land 'flowed with milk and honey,' and that they were sure to conquer it. They would not believe Him unless they had verification of His promises. And when they got their own fears reflected in the multiplying mirror of the spies' report, they took men's words for gospel, and gave to them a credence without examination or qualification, which they had never given to God. I think that I have heard of people who inveigh against Christians for their slavish acceptance of the absolute authority of

Jesus Christ, and who pin their faith to some man's teaching with a credulity quite as great as and much less warrantable than ours.

Note the bad bargain which unbelief is ready to make. They contemplated a risky alternative to the brave dash against Canaan. There would be quite as much peril in going back as forward. The march from Egypt had not been so easy; but what would it be when there were no Moses, no Jethro, no manna, no pillar? And what sort of reception would wait them in Egypt, and what fate befall them there? In front, there were perils; but God would be with them. They would have to fight their way, but with the joyous feeling that victory was sure, and that every blow struck, and every step marched, brought them nearer triumphant peace. If they turned, every step would carry them farther from their hopes, and nearer the dreary putting on of the old yoke, which 'neither they nor their fathers were able to bear.' They would buy slavery at as dear a price as they would have to pay for freedom and wealth. Yet they elected the baser course, and thought themselves prudent and careful of themselves in doing so. Is the breed of such miscalculators extinct? Far greater hardships and pains are met on the road of departure from God, than any which befall His servants. To follow Him involves a conflict, but to shirk the battle does not bring immunity from strife. The alternatives are not warfare or peace, God's service or liberty. The most prudent self-love would coincide with the most self-sacrificing heroic consecration, and no man can worse consult his own well-being than in seeking escape from the dangers and toil of enlisting in God's army, by running back through the desert to put his neck in chains in Egypt.

As Moses said: 'Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart for the abundance of all things, therefore thou shalt serve thine enemies, in hunger, and in thirst, and in want of all things.'

II. The faithful four. Moses and Aaron, Caleb and Joshua, are the only Abdiels in that crowd of unbelieving dastards. Their own peril does not move them; their only thought is to dissuade from the fatal refusal to advance. The leader had no armed force with which to put down revolt, and stood wholly undefended and powerless. It was a cruel position for him to see the work of his life crumbling to pieces, and every hope for his people dashed by their craven fears. Is there anywhere a nobler piece of self-abnegation than his prostrating himself before them in the eagerness of his pleading with them for their own good? If anything could have kindled a spark of generous enthusiasm, that passionate gesture of entreaty would have done it. It is like: 'We beseech you, in His stead, be ye reconciled to God.' Men need to be importuned not to destroy themselves, and he will have most success in such God-like work who, as Moses, is so sure of the fatal issues, and so oblivious of all but saving men from self-inflicted ruin, that he sues as for a boon with tears in his voice, and dignity thrown to the winds.

Caleb and Joshua had a different task,—to make one more attempt to hearten the people by repeating their testimony and their confidence. Tearing their dresses, in sign of mourning, they bravely ring out once more the cheery note of assured faith. They first emphatically reiterate that the land is fertile,—or, as the words literally run, 'good exceedingly, exceedingly.' It is right to stimulate for God's warfare by setting forth the blessedness of the inheritance. 'The recompense of the reward' is not the motive for doing His will, but it is legitimately used as encouragement, in spite of the overstrained objection that virtue for the sake of heaven is spurious virtue. If 'for the sake of heaven,' it is spurious; but it is not spurious because it is heartened by the hope of heaven. In Caleb's former report there was no reason given for his confidence that 'we are well able to overcome.' Thus far all the discussion had been about comparative strength, as any heathen soldier would have reckoned it. But the two heroes speak out the great Name at last, which ought to scatter all fears like morning mist. The rebels had said that Jehovah had 'brought us into this land to fall by the sword.' The two give them back their words with a new turn: 'He will bring us into this land, and give it us.' That is the only antidote to fear. Calculations of comparative force are worse than useless, and their results depend on the temper of the calculator; but, if once God is brought into the account, the sum is ended. When His sword is flung into the scale, whatever is in the other goes up. So Caleb and Joshua brush aside the terrors of the Anaks and all the other bugbears. 'They are bread for us,' we can swallow them at a mouthful; and this was no swaggering boast, but calm, reasonable confidence, because it rested on this, 'the Lord is with us.' True, there was an 'if,' but not an 'if' of doubt, but a condition which they could comply with, and so make it a certainty, 'only rebel not against the Lord, and fear not the people of the land.' Loyalty to Him would give courage, and courage with His presence would be sure of victory. Obedience turns God's 'ifs' into 'verilys.' There, then, we have an outline picture of the work of faith pleading with the rebellious, heartening them and itself by thoughts of the fair inheritance, grasping the assurance of God's omnipotent help, and in the strength thereof wisely despising the strongest foes, and settling itself immovable in the posture of obedience.

III. The sudden appearance of the all-seeing Lord. The bold remonstrance worked the people into a fury, and fidelity was about to reap the reward which the crowd ever gives to those who try to save it from its own base passions. Nothing is more hateful to resolute sinners than good counsel which is undeniably true. But just as the stones were beginning to fly, the 'glory of the Lord,' that wondrous light which dwelt above the ark in the inmost shrine, came forth before all the awestruck crowd. The stones would be dropped fast enough, and a hush of dread would follow the howling rage of the angry crowd. Our text does not go on to the awful judgment which was proclaimed; but we may venture beyond its bounds to point out that the sentence of exclusion from the land was but the necessary consequence of the temper and character which the refusal to advance had betrayed. Such people were not fit for the fight. A new generation, braced by the keen air and scant fare of the desert, with firmer muscles and hearts than these enervated slaves had, was needed for the conquest. The sentence was mercy as well as judgment; it was better that they should live in the wilderness, and die there by natural process, after having had more education in God's loving care, than that they should be driven unwillingly to a conflict which, in their state of mind, would have been but their butchery. None the less, it is an awful condemnation for a man to be brought by God's providence face to face with a great possibility of service and of blessing, and then to show himself such that God has to put him aside, and look for other instruments. The Israelites were excluded from Canaan by no arbitrary decree, but by their own faithless fears, which made their victory impossible. 'They could not enter in because of unbelief.' In like manner our unbelief shuts us out from salvation, because we can only enter in by faith; and the 'rest that remains' is of such a nature that it is impossible for even His love to give it to the unbelieving. 'Let us labour, therefore, to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.'

MOSES THE INTERCESSOR

'Pardon, I beseech Thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of Thy mercy, and as Thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.'—NUM. xiv. 19.

SEE how in this story a divine threat is averted and a divine promise is broken, thus revealing a standing law that these in Scripture are conditional.

This striking incident of Moses' intercession suggests to us some thoughts as to

I. The ground of the divine forgiveness.

The appeal is not based on anything in the people. God is not asked to forgive because of their repentance or their faith. True, these are the conditions on which His pardon is received by us, but they are not the reasons why it is given by Him. Nor does Moses appeal to any sacrifices that had been offered and were conceived to placate God. But he goes deeper than all such pleas, and lays hold, with sublime confidence, on God's own nature as his all-powerful plea. 'The greatness of Thy mercy' is the ground of the divine forgiveness, and the mightiest plea that human lips can urge. It suggests that His very nature is pardoning love; that 'mercy' is proper to Him, that it is the motive and impulse of His acts. He forgives because He is mercy. That is the foundation truth. It is the deep spring from which by inherent impulse all the streams of forgiveness well up.

What was true when Moses prayed for the rebels is true to-day. Christ's work is the consequence, not the cause, of God's pardoning love. It is the channel through which the waters reach us, but the waters made the channel for themselves.

II. The persistency of the divine pardon.

'As thou hast forgiven . . . even until now.'

His past is the guarantee of His future. This is true of every one of His attributes. There is no limitation to the divine forgiveness; you cannot exhaust it.

Sometimes there may be long tracts of almost utter godlessness, or times of apathy. Sometimes there may be bursts of great and unsanctified evil after many professions of fidelity, as in David's case. Sometimes there may be but a daily experience in which there is little apparent progress, little consciousness of growing mastery over sin, little of deepening holiness and spiritual power. Be it so! To all such, and to every other form of Christian unfaithfulness, this blessed thought applies.

We are apt to think as if our many pardons in the past made future pardons less likely, whereas the truth is that we have received forgiveness so often in the past that we may be quite sure that it will never fail us in the future. God has established a precedent in His dealings with us. He binds Himself by His past.

As in His creative energy, the forces that flung the whole universe forth were not exhausted by the act, but subsist continually to sustain it, as 'He fainteth not, neither is weary,' so in the works of His providence, and more especially of His grace, there is nothing in the exercise of any of His attributes to exhaust *that* attribute, nothing in the constant appeal which we make to His forgiving grace to weary out that grace. And thus we may learn, even from the unfading glories of the heavens and the undimmed splendours of His creative works, the lesson that, in the holier region of His love, and His pardoning mercy, there is no exhaustion, and that all the past instances of His pardoning grace only make the broader, firmer ground of certainty as to His continuous present and future forgiveness for all our iniquity. He who has proposed to us the 'seventy times seven' as the number of our forgivenesses will not let His own fall short of that tale. Our iniquities may be 'more than the hairs of our heads,' but as the psalmist who found his to be so comforted himself with thinking, God's 'thoughts which are to usward' were 'more than can be numbered.' There would be a pardoning thought for every sin, and after all sins had been forgiven, there would be 'multitudes of redemptions' still available for penitent souls.

There is but one thing that limits the divine pardon, and that is continuous rejection of it.

Whoever seeks to be pardoned *is* pardoned.

III. The manner of the divine forgiveness.

He pardoned, but He also inflicted punishment, and in both He loves equally. The worst, that is the spiritual, consequences (which are the punishments) of sin, namely separation and alienation from God, He removes in the very act of forgiveness, but His pardon does not affect the natural consequences. 'Thou wast a God that forgavest them and tookest vengeance of their inventions,' says a psalmist in reference to this very incident. Thank God that He loves us too wisely and well not to let us by experience 'know that it is a bitter thing to forsake the Lord.'

It is a blessing that He does so, and a sign that we are pardoned, if we rightly use it.

IV. The vehicle of the divine forgiveness.

The Mediator. Moses here may be taken as a dim shadow of Christ.

'Moses was faithful in all his house,' but Jesus is the true Mediator, whose intercession consists in presenting the constant efficacy of His sacrifice, and to whom God ever says, 'I have pardoned according to Thy word.'

Trust utterly to Him. You cannot weary out the forgiving love of God. 'Christ ever liveth to make intercession'; with God is 'plenteous redemption.' 'He shall redeem Israel out of *all* his iniquities.'

SERVICE A GIFT

'. . . I have given your priest's office unto you as a service of gift.'—NUM. xviii. 7.

ALL Christians are priests—to offer sacrifices, alms, especially prayers; to make God known to men.

I. Our priesthood is a gift of God's love.

We are apt to think of our duties as burdensome. They are an honour and a mark of God's grace.

1. They are His gift—

(*a*) The power to do. All capacities and possessions from Him.

(*b*) The wish to do. 'Worketh in you to will.'

(*c*) The right to do, through Christ.

2. They are a blessing.

(*a*) Note the good effects on ourselves—the increase of fellowship with Him, the strengthening of all holy desires.

(*b*) The future benefits. Apply this to prayer and to effort on behalf of our fellow-men.

II. Our priesthood is to be done as a service—under a sense of obligation to a master, with diligence (an *ἔργον*, not a *πάρεργον*).

III. Our priesthood is to be done as a gift to God—to be done joyfully, giving ourselves back to Him: 'Yield yourselves unto God'—'your reasonable service.'

Then only do we really possess ourselves, and 'all things are ours, for we are Christ's, and Christ is God's.'

THE WATERS OF MERIBAH

Then came the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, into the desert of Zin in the first month: and the people abode in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there. 2. And there was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. 3. And the people chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the Lord! 4. And why have ye brought up the congregation of the Lord into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there? 5. And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? It is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink. 6. And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces: and the glory of the Lord appeared unto them. 7. And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, 8. Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink. 9. And Moses took the rod from before the Lord, as He commanded him. 10. And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? 11. And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. 12. And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed Me not, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them. 13. This is the water of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the Lord, and He was sanctified in them.'—NUM. xx. 1-13.

KADESH had witnessed the final trial and failure of the generation that came out of Egypt; now w see the first trial and failure of the new generation, thirty-seven years after, on the same spot. Deep silence shrouds the history of these dreary years; but, probably, the congregation was broken up, and small parties roamed over the country, without purpose or hope, while Moses and a few of the leaders kept by the tabernacle. There is a certain emphasis in the phrase of the first verse of this chapter, 'the children of Israel, even the *whole* congregation,' which suggests that this was the first reassembling of the scattered units since the last act of the 'whole congregation.' 'The first month' was, then, the first of the fortieth year, and the gathering was either in obedience to the summons of Moses, who knew that the fixed time had now come, or was the result of common knowledge of the fact. In any case, we have here the first act of a new epoch, and the question to be tried is whether the new men are any better than the old. It is this which gives importance to the event, and explains the bitterness of Moses at finding the old spirit living in the children. It was his trial as well as theirs. He resumed the functions which had substantially been in abeyance for a generation, and by his conduct showed that he had become unfit for the new form which the leadership must take with the invasion of Canaan.

I. We note the old murmurings on the lips of the new generation. The lament of a later prophet fits these hereditary grumblers,—'In vain have I smitten your children; they received no correction.' The place where they reassembled might have taught them the sin of unbelief; their parents' graves should have enforced the lesson. But the long years of wandering, and two millions of deaths, had been useless. The weather-beaten but sturdy strength of the four old men, the only survivors, might have preached the wisdom of trust in the God in whose 'favour is life.' But the people 'had learned nothing and forgotten nothing.' The old cuckoo-cry, which had become so monotonous from their fathers, is repeated, with differences, not in their favour. They do not, indeed, murmur directly against God, because they regard Moses and Aaron as responsible. 'Why,' say they, 'have *ye* brought up the congregation of the Lord?' They seem to use that name with a touch of pride in their relation to God, while destitute of any real obedience, and so they show the first traces of the later spirit of the nation. They have acquired cattle while living in the oases of the wilderness, and they are anxious about them. They acknowledge the continuity of national life in their question, 'Wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt?' though most of them had been born in the wilderness. The fear that moved their fathers to unbelief was more reasonable and less contemptible than this murmuring, which ignores God all but utterly, and is ready to throw up everything at the first taste of privation.

It is a signal instance of the solemn law by which the fathers' sins are inherited by the children who prove themselves heirs to their ancestors by repeating their deeds. It is fashionable now to deny original sin, and equally fashionable to affirm 'heredity,' which is the same thing, put into scientific language. There is such a thing as national character persistent through generations, each unit of which adds something to the force of the tendencies which he receives and transmits, but which never are so omnipotent as to destroy individual guilt, however they may lighten it.

Note, too, the awful power of resistance to God's educating possessed by our wills. The whole purpose of these men's lives, thus far, had been to fit them for being God's instruments, and for the reception of His blessing. The desert was His school for body and mind, where muscles and wills were to be braced, and solitude and expectation might be nurses of lofty thoughts, and in the silence God's voice might sound. What better preparation of a hardy race of God-trusting heroes could there have been, and what came of it all? Failure all but complete! The instrument tempered with so much care has its edge turned at the first stroke. The old sore breaks out at the old spot. Man's will has an awful power to thwart God's training; and of all the sad mysteries of this sad mysterious world, this is the saddest and most mysterious, and is the root of all other sadness and mystery,—that a man can set his pin-point of a will against that great Will which gives him all his power, and when God beckons can say, 'I will not,' and can render His most sedulous discipline ineffectual.

Note, too, that trivial things are large enough to hide plain duties and bright possibilities. These men knew that they had come to Kadesh for the final assault, which was to recompense all their hardships. Their desert training should have made them less resourceless and desperate when water failed; but the hopes of conquest and the duty of trust cannot hold their own against present material inconvenience. They even seem to make bitter mockery of the promises, when they complain that Kadesh is 'no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates,' which were the fruits brought by the spies,—as if they had said, 'So this stretch of waterless sand is the fertile land you talked of, is it? This is all that we have got by re-assembling here.' Do we not often feel that the drought of Kadesh is more real than the grapes of Eshcol? Are we not sometimes tempted to bitter comparisons of the fair promises with the gloomy realities? Does our courage never flag, nor our faith falter, nor swirling clouds of doubt hide the inheritance from our weary and tear-filled eyes? He that is without sin may cast the first stone at these men; but whoever knows his own weak heart will confess that, if he had been among that thirsty crowd, he would, most likely, have made one of the murmurers.

II. Note God's repetition of His old gift to the new generation. Moses makes no attempt to argue with the people, but casts himself in entreaty before the door of the Tabernacle, as if crushed and helpless in face of this heart-breaking proof of the persistent obstinacy of the old faults. God's answer recalls the former miracle at Rephidim (Exodus xvii. 1-7) in the early days of the march, when the same cries had come from lips now silent, and the rock, smitten at God's command by the rod which had parted the sea, yielded water. The only differences are that here Moses is bid to speak, not to smite; and that the miracle is to be done before all the congregation, instead of before the elders only. Both variations seem to have the common purpose of enhancing the wonder, and confirming the authority of Moses, to a generation to whom the old deliverances were only hearsay, and many of whom were in contact with the leader for the first time. The fact that we have here the beginning of a new epoch, and a new set of people, goes far to explain the resemblance of the two incidents, without the need of supposing, with many critics, that they are but different versions of one 'legend.' The repetition of scarcity of water is not wonderful; the recurrence of the murmurings is the sad proof of the unchanged temper of the people, and the repetition of the miracle is the merciful witness of the patience of God. His charity 'is not easily provoked, is not soon angry,' but stoops to renew gifts which had been so little appreciated that the remembrance of them failed to cure distrust. Unbelief is obstinate, but His loving purpose is more persistent still. Rephidim should have made the murmuring at Kadesh impossible; but, if it does not, then He will renew the mercy, though it had been once wasted, and will so shape the second gift that it shall recall the first, if haply both may effect what one had failed to do. When need is repeated, the supply is forthcoming, even when it is demanded by sullen and forgetful distrust. We can wear out men's patience, but God's is inexhaustible. The same long-suffering Hand that poured water from the rock for two generations of distrustful murmurers still lavishes its misused gifts on us, to win us to late repentance, 'and upbraideth not' for our slowness to learn the lessons of His mercies.

III. Note the breaking down at last of the long-tried leader's patience. It is in striking contrast with the patience of God. Psalm cvi. 32, 33, describes the sin of Moses as twofold; namely, anger and speaking 'unadvisedly.' His harsh words, so unlike his pleadings on the former occasion of rebellion at Kadesh, have a worse thing than an outburst of temper in them. 'Must *we* fetch you water out of the rock?' arrogates to himself the power of working miracles. He forgets that he was as much an instrument, and as little a force, as his own rod. His angry scolding betrays wounded personal importance, and annoyance at rebellion against his own authority, rather than grief at the people's distrust of God, and also a distinct clouding over of his own consciousness of dependence for all his power on God, and an impure mingling of thoughts of self. The same turbid blending of anger and self-regard impelled his arm to the passionately repeated strokes, which, in his heat, he substituted for the quiet words that he was bidden to speak. The Palestinian Targum says very significantly, that at the first stroke the rock dropped blood, thereby indicating the tragic sinfulness of the angry blow. How unworthy a representative of the long-suffering God was this angry man! 'The servant of the Lord must not strive,' nor give the water with which he is entrusted, with contempt or anger in his heart. That gift requires meek compassion in its stewards.

But the failure of Moses' patience was only too natural. The whole incident has to be studied as the first of a new era, in which both leader and led were on their trial. During the thirty-seven years of waiting, Moses had had but little exercise of that part of his functions, and little experience of the people's temper. He must have looked forward anxiously to the result of the desert hardening; he must have felt more remote from and above the children than he did to their parents, his contemporaries who had come with him from Egypt, and so his disappointment must have been proportionately keen, when the first difficulty that rose revealed the old spirit in undiminished force. For forty years he had been patient, and ready to swallow mortifications and ignore rebellion against himself, and to offer himself for his people; but now, when men whom he had seen in their swaddling-clothes showed the same stiff-necked distrust as had killed their fathers, the breaking-point of his patience was reached. That burst of anger is a grave symptom of lessened love for the sinful murmurers; and lessened love always means lessened power to guide and help The people are not changed, but Moses is. He has no longer the invincible patience, the utter self-oblivion, the readiness for self-sacrifice, which had borne him up of old, and so he fails. We may learn from his failure that the prime requisite for doing God's work is love, which cannot be moved to anger nor stirred to self-assertion, but meets and conquers murmuring and rebellion by patient holding forth of God's gift, and is, in some faint degree, an echo of His endless long-suffering. He who would serve men must, sleeping or waking, carry them in his heart, and pity their sin. They who would represent God to men, and win men for God, must be 'imitators of God . . . and walk in love.' If the bearer of the water of life offers it with 'Hear, ye rebels,' it will flow untasted.

IV. Note the sentence on the leader, and the sad memorial name. Moses is blamed for not believing nor sanctifying God. His self-assertion in his unadvised speech came from unbelief, or forgetfulness of his dependence. He who claims power to himself, denies it to God. Moses put himself between God and the people, not to show but to hide God; and, instead of exalting God's holiness before them by declaring Him to be the giver, he intercepted the thanks and diverted them to himself. But was his momentary failure not far too severely punished? To answer that question, we must recur to the thought of the importance of this event as beginning a new chapter, and as a test for both Moses and Israel. His failure was a comparatively small matter in itself; and if the sentence is regarded merely as the punishment of a sin, it appears sternly disproportionate to the offence. Were eighty years of faithful service not sufficient to procure the condonation of one moment's impatience? Is not that harsh treatment? But a tiny blade above ground may indicate the presence of a poisonous root, needing drastic measures for its extirpation; and the sentence was not only punishment for sin, but kind, though punitive, relief from an office for which Moses had no longer, in full measure, his old qualifications. The subsequent history does not show any withdrawal of God's favour from him, and certainly it would be no very sore sorrow to be freed from the heavy load, carried so long. There is disapprobation, no doubt, in the sentence; but it treats the conduct of Moses rather as a symptom of lessened fitness for his heavy responsibility than as sin; and there is as much kindness as condemnation in saying to the wearied veteran, who has stood at his post so long and has taken up arms once more, 'You have done enough. You are not what you were. Other hands must hold the leader's staff. Enter into rest.'

Note that Moses was condemned for doing what Jesus always did, asserting his power to work miracles. What was unbelief and a sinful obtrusion of himself in God's place when the great lawgiver did it, was right and endorsed by God when the Carpenter of Nazareth did it. Why the difference? A greater than Moses is here, when He says to us, 'What will ye that I should do unto you?'

The name of Meribah-Kadesh is given to suggest the parallel and difference with the other miraculous flow of water. The two incidents are thus brought into connection, and yet individualised. 'Meribah,' which means 'strife,' brands the murmuring as sinful antagonism to God: 'Kadesh,' which means 'holy,' brings both the miracle and the sentence under the common category of acts by which God manifested His holiness to the new generation; and so the double name is a reminder of sin that they may be humble, and of mingled mercy and judgment that they may 'trust and obey.'

THE POISON AND THE ANTIDOTE

'And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. 5. And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. 6. And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. 7. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee; pray unto the Lord, that He take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. 8. And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. 9. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.'—NUM. xxi. 4-9.

THE mutinous discontent of the Israelites had some excuse when they had to wheel round once more and go southwards in consequence of the refusal of passage through Edom. The valley which stretches from the Dead Sea to the head of the eastern arm of the Red Sea, down which they had to plod in order to turn the southern end of the mountains on its east side, and then resume their northern march outside the territory of Edom, is described as a 'horrible desert.' Certainly it yielded neither bread nor water. So the faithless pilgrims broke into their only too familiar murmurings, utterly ignoring their thirty-eight years of preservation. 'There is no bread.' No; but the manna had fallen day by day. 'Our soul loatheth this light bread.' Yes; but it was bread all the same. Thus coarse tastes prefer garlic and onions to Heaven's food, and complain of being starved while it is provided. 'There is no water.' No; but the 'rock that followed them' gushed out abundance, and there was no thirst.

Murmuring brought punishment, which was meant for amendment. 'The Lord sent fiery serpents.' That statement does not necessarily imply a miracle. Scripture traces natural phenomena directly to God's will, and often overleaps intervening material links between the cause which is God and the effect which is a physical fact. The neighbourhood of Elath at the head of the gulf is still infested with venomous serpents, 'marked with fiery red spots,' from which, or possibly from the inflammation caused by their poison, they are here called 'fiery.' God made the serpents, though they were hatched by eggs laid by mothers; He brought Israel to the place; He willed the poisonous stings. If we would bring ordinary events into immediate connection with the Divine hand, and would see in all calamities fatherly chastisement 'for our profit,' we should understand life better than we often do.

The swift stroke had fallen without warning or voice to interpret it, but the people knew in their hearts whence and why it had come. Their quick recognition of its source and purpose, and their swift repentance, are to be put to their credit. It is well for us when we interpret for ourselves God's judgments, and need no Moses to urge us to humble ourselves before Him. Conscious guilt is conscious of unworthiness to approach God, though it dares to speak to offended men. The request for Moses' intercession witnesses to the instinct of conscience, requiring a mediator,—an instinct which has led to much superstition and been terribly misguided, but which is deeply true, and is met once for all in Jesus Christ, our Advocate before the throne. The request shows that the petitioners were sure of Moses' forgiveness for their distrust of him, and thus it witnesses to his 'meekness.' His pardon was a kind of pledge of God's. Was the servant likely to be more gracious than the Master? A good man's readiness to forgive helps bad men to believe in a pardoning God. It reflects some beam of Heaven's mercy.

Moses had often prayed for the people when they had sinned, and before they had repented. It was not likely that he would be slow to do so when they asked him, for the asking was accompanied with ample confession. The serpents had done their work, and the prayer that the chastisement should cease would be based on the fact that the sin had been forsaken. But the narrative seems to anticipate that, after the prayer had been offered and answered, Israelites would still be bitten. If they were, that confirms the presumption that the sending of the serpents was not miraculous. It also brings the whole facts into line with the standing methods of Providence, for the outward consequences of sin remain to be reaped after the sin has been forsaken; but they change their character and are no longer destructive, but only disciplinary. 'Serpents' still 'bite' if we have 'broken down hedges,' but there is an antidote.

The command to make a brazen or copper serpent, and set it on some conspicuous place, that to look on it might stay the effect of the poison, is remarkable, not only as sanctioning the forming of an image, but as associating healing power with a material object. Two questions must be considered separately,—What did the method of cure say to the men who turned their bloodshot, languid eyes to it? and What does it mean for us, who see it by the light of our Lord's great words about it? As to the former question, we have not to take into account the Old Testament symbolism which makes the serpent the emblem of Satan or of sin. Serpents had bitten the wounded. Here was one like them, but without poison, hanging harmless on the pole. Surely that would declare that God had rendered innocuous the else fatal creatures. The elevation of the serpent was simply intended to make it visible from afar; but it could not have been set so high as to be seen from all parts of the camp, and we must suppose that the wounded were in many cases carried from the distant parts of the wide-spreading encampment to places whence they could catch a glimpse of it glittering in the sunshine. We are not told that trust in God was an essential part of the look, but that is taken for granted. Why else should a half-dead man lift his heavy eyelids to look? Such a one knew that God had commanded the image to be made, and had promised healing for a look. His gaze was fixed on it, in obedience to the command involved in the promise, and was, in some measure, a manifestation of faith. No doubt the faith was very imperfect, and the desire was only for physical healing; but none the less it had in it the essence of faith. It would have been too hard a requirement for men through whose veins the swift poison was burning its way, and who, at the best, were so little capable of rising above sense, to have asked from them, as the condition of their cure, a trust which had no external symbol to help it. The singularity of the method adopted witnesses to the graciousness of God, who gave their feebleness a thing that they could look at. to aid them in grasping the unseen power which really effected the cure. 'He that turned himself to it,' says the Book of Wisdom, 'was not saved by the thing which he saw, but by Thee, that art the Saviour of all.'

Our Lord has given us the deepest meaning of the brazen serpent. Taught by Him, we are to see in it a type of Himself, the significance of which could not be apprehended till Calvary had given the key. Three distinct points of parallel are suggested by His use of the incident in His conversation with Nicodemus. First, He takes the serpent as an emblem of Himself. Now it is clear that it is so, not in regard to the saving power that dwells in Him, but in regard to His sinless manhood, which was made 'in the likeness of sinful flesh,' yet 'without sin.' The symbolism which takes the serpent as the material type of sin comes into view now, and is essential to the full comprehension of the typical significance of the incident.

Secondly, Jesus laid stress on the 'lifting up' of the serpent. That 'lifting up' has two meanings. It primarily refers to the Crucifixion, wherein, just as the death-dealing power was manifestly triumphed over in the elevation of the brazen serpent, the power of sin is exhibited as defeated, as Paul says, 'triumphing over them in it' (Col. ii. 14, 15). But that lifting up on the Cross draws after it the elevation to the throne, and to that, or, rather, to both considered as inseparably united, our Lord refers when He says, 'I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.'

Thirdly, the condition of healing is paralleled. 'When he looked unto the serpent of brass, he lived.' 'That whosoever believeth may in Him have eternal life. From the serpent no healing power flowed; but our eternal life is '*in* Him,' and *from* Him it flows into our poisoned, dying nature. The sole condition of receiving into ourselves that new life which is free from all taint of sin, and is mighty enough to arrest the venom that is diffused through every drop of blood, is faith in Jesus lifted on the Cross to slay the sin that is slaying mankind, and raised to the throne to bestow His own immortal and perfect life on all who look to Him. The bitten Israelite might be all but dead. The poison wrought swiftly; but if he from afar lifted his glazing eyeballs to the serpent on the pole, a swifter healing overtook the death that was all but conqueror, and cast it out, and he who was borne half unconscious to the foot of the standard went away a sound man, 'walking, and leaping, and praising God.' So it may be with any man, however deeply tainted with sin, if he will trust himself to Jesus, and from 'the ends of the earth' 'look unto' Him 'and be saved.' His power knows no hopeless cases. He *can* cure all. He *will* cure our most ingrained sin, and calm the hottest fever of our poisoned blood, if we will let Him. The only thing that we have to do is to gaze, with our hearts in our eyes and faith in our hearts, on Him, as He is lifted on the Cross and the throne. But we must so gaze, or we die, for none but He can cast out the coursing venom. None but He can arrest the swift-footed death that is intertwined with our very natures.

BALAAM

'He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor to Pethor, which is by the river of the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, Behold there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me.'—NUM. xxii. 5.

GIVE a general outline of the history. See Bishop Butler's great sermon.

I. How much knowledge and love of good there may be in a bad man.

Balaam was a prophet:

(*a*) He knew something of the divine character.

(*b*) He knew what righteousness was (Micah v. 8).

(*c*) He knew of a future state, and longed for 'the last end of the righteous.'

He would not break the law of God, and curse by word of mouth:

But yet for all that he wanted to curse. He wanted to do the wrong thing, and that made him bad. And when he durst not do it in one way, he did it in another.

So he is a picture of the universal blending and mixture that there is even in bad men.

It is not knowledge that makes a man good.

It is not aspirations after righteousness. These dwell more or less in all souls.

It is not desire 'to go to heaven'—everybody has that desire.

Perfectly vicious men are devils. There is always the blending.

Many of us are trusting to these vagrant wishes, but my friends, it is not what a man would sometimes like, but what the whole set and tenor of his life tends towards, that makes him. There may be plenty of backwater eddies and cross-currents in the sea, but the tide goes on all the same.

> 'All these fancies and their whole array
> One cunning bosom sin blows quite away.'

'Let no man deceive you; he that doeth righteousness is righteous.'

Do not trust your convictions; they are powerless in the fight.

II. How men may deceive themselves about their condition, or the self-illusions and compromises of sin.

These convictions will never, by themselves, keep a man from evil, but they may lead men to try to compromise, just as Balaam did. He would go, but he would not, for the life of him, curse; and he evidently thought that he was a hero in firmness and a martyr to duty.

He would not curse in words, but he did it in another way—by means of Baal-peor.

So we find men making compromises between duty and inclination; keeping the letter and breaking the spirit; obeying in some respects and indemnifying themselves for their obedience by their disobedience in others; very devout, attentive to all religious observances, and yet sinning on. And we find such men playing tricks upon themselves, and really deluding themselves into the idea that they are very good men!

This is the great characteristic of sin, its deceitfulness. It always comes as an 'angel of light,' like some of those weird stories in which we read about a strange guest at a banquet who discloses a skeleton below the wedding garment!

'Father of lies.' '*Nihil imbecillius denudato diabolo.*' The more one sins, the less capable he becomes of discerning evil. Conscience becomes sophisticated, and it is always possible to refine away its judgments.

'By reason of use have their senses exercised to discern.' 'Take heed lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.'

III. The absurdity and unreasonableness of unrighteousness.

We look at Balaam, and think, how could a man purpose anything so foolish as to go on seeking for an opportunity to break a law which he knew to be irrevocable!

Yet what did he do but what every sinner does?

All sin is the breach of law which at the very moment of breaking is known to be imperative.

All sin is thus the overbearing of conscience, or the sophistication of conscience, and all sin is the incurring voluntarily of consequences which at the moment are or might be known to be certain, and far overbalancing any fancied 'wages of unrighteousness.'

Thus all sin is the overbearing of reason or the sophisticating of reason by passion. Men know the absurdity of sin, and yet men will go on sinning. 'A rogue is a roundabout fool.' All wrongdoing is a mighty blunder. It is only righteousness which is congruous with a man's reason, with a man's conscience, with a man's highest happiness. 'The fear of the Lord,' that is wisdom.

IV. The wages of unrighteousness.

How Balaam's experiment ended—his death. He tried to make the 'best of both worlds,' so he ran with the hare and hunted with the hounds, and this was how it ended, as it always does, as it always will. How death ends all the illusions, sternly breaks down all the compromises, reveals all the absurdities!

Men are one thing or the other. Learn, then, the lesson that no gifts, no talents, no convictions, no aspirations will avail.

Let this sad figure which looks out upon us with grey streaming hair and uplifted hands from beside the altar on Pisgah speak to us.

How near the haven it is possible to be cast away! Like Bunyan's way to hell from near the gate of the celestial city.

Balaam said, 'Let me die the death of the righteous!' and his death was thus:—'Balaam they slew with the sword,' and his epitaph is 'Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness,' got them, and perished!

AN UNFULFILLED DESIRE

'. . . Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!'—NUM. xxiii. 10.

'. . . Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword.'—NUM. xxxi. 8.

PONDER these two pictures. Take the first scene. A prophet, who knows God and His will, is standing on the mountain top, and as he looks down over the valley beneath him, with its acacia-trees and swift river, there spread the tents of Israel. He sees them, and knows that they are 'a people whom the Lord hath blessed.' Brought there to curse, 'he blesses them altogether'; and as he gazes upon their ordered ranks and sees somewhat of the wondrous future that lay before them, his mind is filled with the thought of all the blessedness of that righteous nation, and the sigh of longing comes to his lips, 'May I be with them in life and death; may I have no higher honour, no calmer end, than to lie down and die as one of the chosen people, with memories of a divine hand that has protected me all through the past, and quiet hopes of the same hand holding me up in the great darkness!' A devout aspiration, a worthy desire!

Look at the other picture. Midian has seduced Israel to idolatry and its constant companion, sensual sin. The old lawgiver has for his last achievement to punish the idolater. 'Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites, afterwards thou shalt be gathered to thy people.' So each tribe gives its contingent to the fight, and under the fierce and prompt Phinehas, whose javelin had already smitten one of the chief offenders, they go forth. Fire and sword, devastation and victory, mark their track. The princes of Midian fall before the swift rush of the desert-born invaders. And —sad, strange company!—among them is the 'man who saw the vision of the Almighty, and knew the knowledge of the Most High'! he who had taught Moab the purest lessons of morality, and Midian, alas! the practice of the vilest profligacy; he who saw from afar 'the sceptre arise out of Israel and the Star from Jacob'; he who longed to 'die the death of the righteous'! The onset of the avenging host, with the 'shout of a king' in their midst; the terror of the flight, the riot of havoc and bloodshed, and, finally, the quick thrust of the sharp Israelite sword in some strong hand, and the grey hairs all dabbled with his blood—these were what the man came to who had once breathed the honest desire, 'Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his'!

I. There is surely a solemn lesson for us all here—as touching the danger of mere vague religious desires and convictions which we do not allow to determine our conduct.

Balaam had evidently much knowledge. Look at these points—

(*a*) His knowledge of the covenant-name of God.

(*b*) His knowledge of a pure morality and a spiritual worship far beyond sacrificial notions, and in some respects higher than the then Old Testament standpoint.

(c) The knowledge (which is implied in the text) of a future state, which had gone far into the background, even if it had not been altogether lost, among the Israelites. Is it not remarkable that the religious ideas of this man were in advance of Israel's at this time; that there seems to have lingered among these 'outsiders' more of a pure faith than in Israel itself?

What a lesson here as to the souls led by God and enlightened by Him beyond the pale of Judaism!

But all this knowledge, of what use was it to Balaam? He knows about God: does he seek to serve Him? He preaches morality to Moab, and he teaches Midian to 'teach the children of Israel to commit fornication.' He knows something of the blessedness of a 'righteous man's' death, and perhaps sees faintly the shining gates beyond—but how does it all end? What a gulf between *knowledge* and *life*!

What is the use of correct ideas about God? They may be the foundations of holy thoughts, and they are meant to be so. I am not setting up emotion above principle, or fancying that there can be religion without theology; but for what are all our thoughts about God given us?

(*a*) That they may influence our hearts.

(*b*) That they may subdue our wills.

(*c*) That they may mould our practical life.

If they do not do that—then *what* do they do?

They constitute a positive hindrance—like the dead lava-blocks that choke the mouth of a crater, or the two deposits on the bottom of a boiler, soot outside and crust inside, which keep the fire from getting at the water. They have lost their power because they are so familiar. They are weakened by not being practised. The very organs of intelligence are, as it were, ossified. Self-complacency lays hold on the possession of these ideas and shields itself against all appeals with the fact of possessing them. Many a man mistakes, in his own case, the knowledge of the truth for obedience to the truth. All this is seen in everyday life, and with reference to all manner of convictions, but it is most apparent and most fatal about Christian truth. I appeal to the many who hear and know all about 'the word.' What more is needed? That you should do what you know ('Be not hearers only'); that you should yield your whole being to Christ, the living Word.

II. Balaam is an example of convictions which remain inefficacious.

It was not without some sense of his own character, and some forebodings of what was possibly brooding over him, that he uttered these words of the text. But they were transitory emotions, and they passed away.

I suppose that every man who hears the gospel proclaimed is, at some time or other, conscious of dawning thoughts which, if followed, would lead him to decision for Christ. I suppose that every man among us is conscious of thoughts visiting him many a time when he least expects them, which, if honestly obeyed, would work an entire revolution in his life.

I do not wish to speak as if unbelieving men were the only people who were unfaithful to their consciences, but rather to deal with what is a besetting sin of us all, though it reaches its highest aggravation in reference to the gospel.

Such stings of conviction come to us all, but how are they deadened?

(*a*) By simple neglect. Pay no attention to them; do not do anything in consequence, and they will gradually disappear. The voice unheard will cease to speak. Non-obedience to conscience will in the end almost throttle conscience.

(*b*) By angry rejection.

(*c*) By busy occupation with the outer world.

(*d*) By sinful occupation with it.

Then consider that such dealing with our convictions leaves us far worse men than before, and if continued will end in utter insensibility.

What should we do with such convictions? Reverently follow them. And in so doing they will grow and increase, and lead us at last to God and peace.

Special application of all this to our attitude towards Christian truth.

III. Balaam is an instance of wishes that are never fulfilled.

He wished to die 'as the righteous.' How did he die? miserably; and why?

(1) Because his wish was deficient in character.

It was *one* among a great many, feeble and not predominant, occasioned by circumstances, and so fading when these disappeared. Like many men's relation to the gospel who would *like* to be Christians, and are not These vagrant wishes are nothing; mere 'catspaws' of wind, not a breeze. They are not real, even while they last, and so they come to nothing.

(2) Because it was partially wrong in its object.

He was willing to die the death, but not to live the life, of the righteous; like many men who would be very glad to 'go to heaven when they die,' but who will not be Christians while they live.

Now, God forbid that I should say that his wish was wrong! But only it was not enough. Such a wish led to no action.

Now, God hears the faintest wish; He does not require that we should will strongly, but He does require that we should desire, and that we should act according to our desires.

Let the close be a brief picture of a righteous death. And oh! if you feel that it is blessed, then let that desire lead you to Christ, and all will be well. Remember that Bunyan saw a byway to hell at the door of the celestial city. Remember how Balaam ended, and stands gibbeted in the New Testament as an evil man, and the type of false teachers. Finally, beware of knowledge which is not operative in conduct, of convictions which are neglected and pass away, of vague desires which come to nought.

EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt. D.

DEUTERONOMY, JOSHUA, JUDGES, RUTH, AND FIRST BOOK OF SAMUEL

CONTENTS

THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

PAGE

God's Faithfulness (Deut. vii. 9) 1

The Lesson of Memory (Deut. viii. 2) . . . 4

The Eating of the Peace-Offering (Deut. xii. 18) . 15

Prophets and the Prophet (Deut. xviii. 9-22) . . 17

A Choice of Masters (Deut. xxviii. 47, 48) . . 22

The Spirit of the Law (Deut. xxx. 11-20) . . 24

God's True Treasure in Man (Deut. xxxii. 9; Titus ii. 14) 29

The Eagle and its Brood (Deut. xxxii. 11) . . 40

Their Rock and Our Rock (Deut. xxxii. 31) . . 47

God and His Saints (Deut. xxxiii. 3) . . . 50

Israel the Beloved (Deut. xxxiii. 12) . . . 57

'At the Bush' (Deut. xxxiii. 16) 61

Shod for the Road (Deut. xxxiii. 25) . . . 67

A Death in the Desert (Deut. xxxiv. 5, 6) . . 77

THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

PAGE

The New Leader's Commission (Joshua i. 1-11) . . 87

The Charge to the Soldier of the Lord (Joshua i. 7, 8) 91

The Untrodden Path and the Guiding Ark (Joshua iii. 4) 98

'The Waters Saw Thee; They were Afraid' (Joshua iii. 5-17) 107

Stones Crying Out (Joshua iv. 10-24) . . . 115

The Captain of the Lord's Host (Joshua v. 14) . . 123

The Siege of Jericho (Joshua vi. 10, 11) . . . 132

Rahab (Joshua vi. 25) 140

Achan's Sin, Israel's Defeat (Joshua vii. 1-12) . . 145

The Sun Stayed (Joshua x. 12) 153

Unwon but Claimed (Joshua xiii. 1-6) . . . 158

Caleb—A Green Old Age (Joshua xiv. 6) . . 160

The Cities of Refuge (Joshua xx. 1-9) . . . 168

The End of the War (Joshua xxi. 43-45; xxii. 1-9) . 175

The National Oath at Shechem (Joshua xxiv. 19-28) . 183

THE BOOK OF JUDGES

PAGE

A SUMMARY OF ISRAEL'S FAITHLESSNESS AND GOD'S PATIENCE (Judges ii. 1-10) 192

ISRAEL'S OBSTINACY AND GOD'S PATIENCE (Judges ii. 11-23) 196

RECREANT REUBEN (Judges v. 16, R.V.) . . . 206

'ALL THINGS ARE YOURS' (Judges v. 20; Job v. 23) . 209

LOVE MAKES SUNS (Judges v. 31) 217

GIDEON'S ALTAR (Judges vi. 24) 225

GIDEON'S FLEECE (Judges vi. 37) 233

'FIT, THOUGH FEW' (Judges vii. 1-8) . . . 236

A BATTLE WITHOUT A SWORD (Judges vii. 13-23) . . 244

STRENGTH PROFANED AND LOST (Judges xvi. 21-31) . 250

THE BOOK OF RUTH

A GENTLE HEROINE, A GENTILE CONVERT (Ruth i. 16-22) . 259

THE FIRST BOOK OF SAMUEL

THE CHILD PROPHET (1 Samuel iii. 1-14) . . . 267

FAITHLESSNESS AND DEFEAT (1 Samuel iv. 1-18) . . 275

PAGE

Repentance and Victory (1 Samuel vii. 1-12) . . 283

'Make Us a King' (1 Samuel viii. 4-20) . . . 291

The Old Judge and the Young King (1 Samuel ix. 15-27) 299

The King after Man's Heart (1 Samuel x. 17-27) . 307

Samuel's Challenge and Charge (1 Samuel xii. 1-15) . 311

Old Truth for a New Epoch (1 Samuel xii. 13-25) . 319

Saul Rejected (1 Samuel xv. 10-23) . . . 323

The Shepherd-King (1 Samuel xvi. 1-13) . . . 332

The Victory of Unarmed Faith (1 Samuel xvii. 32-51) . 340

A Soul's Tragedy (1 Samuel xviii. 5-16) . . . 348

Jonathan, the Pattern of Friendship (1 Samuel xx. 1-13) 354

Love for Hate, the True *Quid Pro Quo* (1 Samuel xxiv. 4-17) 361

Love and Remorse (1 Samuel xxvi. 5-12; 21-25) . . 367

Saul (1 Samuel xxviii. 15) 372

'What Doest Thou Here?' (1 Samuel xxix. 3; 1 Kings xix. 9) 377

The Secret of Courage (1 Samuel xxx. 6) . . 384

At the Front or the Base (1 Samuel xxx. 24) 392

The End of Self-Will (1 Samuel xxxi. 1-13) . . 399

THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

'Know therefore that the Lord thy God, He is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him.'—DEUT. vii. 9.

'FAITHFUL,' like most Hebrew words, has a picture in it. It means something that can be (1) leant on, or (2) builded on.

This leads to a double signification—(1) trustworthy, and that because (2) rigidly observant of obligations. So the word applies to a steward, a friend, or a witness. Its most wonderful and sublime application is to God. It presents to our adoring love—

I. God as coming under obligations to us.

A marvellous and blessed idea. He limits His action, regards Himself as bound to a certain line of conduct.

1. Obligations from His act of creation.

'A faithful Creator,' bound to take care of those whom He has made. To supply their necessities. To satisfy their desires. To give to each the possibility of discharging its ideal.

2. Obligations from His past self.

'God is faithful by whom ye were called,' therefore He will do all that is imposed on Him by His act of calling.

He cannot begin without completing. There are no abandoned mines. There are no half-hewn stones in His quarries, like the block at Baalbec. And this because the divine nature is inexhaustible in power and unchangeable in purpose.

3. Obligations from His own word.

A revelation is presupposed by the notion of faithfulness. It is not possible in heathenism. 'Dumb idols,' which have given their worshippers no promises, cannot be thought of as faithful. By its grand conception of Jehovah as entering into a covenant with Israel, the Old Testament presents Him to our trust as having bound Himself to a known line of action. Thereby He becomes, if we may so phrase it, a constitutional monarch.

That conception of a Covenant is the negation of caprice, of arbitrary sovereignty, of mystery. We know the principles of His government. His majestic 'I wills' cover the whole ground of human life and needs for the present and the future. We can go into no region of life but we find that God has defined His conduct to us there by some word spoken to our heart and binding Him.

4. Obligations from His new Covenant and highest word in Jesus Christ.

'He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.'

II. God as recognising and discharging these obligations.

That He will do so comes from His very nature. With Him there is no change of disposition, no emergence of unseen circumstances, no failure or exhaustion of power.

That He does so is matter of fact. Moses in the preceding context had pointed to facts of history, on which he built the 'know therefore' of the text. On the broad scale the whole world's history is full of illustrations of God's faithfulness to His promises and

His threats. The history of Judaism, the sorrows of nations, and the complications of national events, all illustrate this fact.

The personal history of each of us. The experience of all Christian souls. No man ever trusted in Him and was ashamed. He wills that we should put Him to the proof.

III. God as claiming our trust.

He is faithful, worthy to be trusted, as His deeds show.

Faith is our attitude corresponding to His faithfulness. Faith is the germ of all that He requires from us. How much we need it! How firm it might be! How blessed it would make us!

The thought of God as 'faithful' is, like a precious stone, turned in many directions in Scripture, and wherever turned it flashes light. Sometimes it is laid as the foundation for the confidence that even our weakness will be upheld to the end. as when Paul tells the Corinthians that they will be confirmed to the end, because 'God is faithful, through whom ye were called into the fellowship of His Son' (1 Cor. i. 9). Sometimes there is built on it the assurance of complete sanctification, as when he prays for the Thessalonians that their 'whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord,' and finds it in his heart to pray thus because 'Faithful is He that calleth you, who will also do it' (1 Thess. v. 24). Sometimes it is presented as the steadfast stay grasping which faith can expect apparent impossibilities, as when Sara 'judged Him faithful who had promised' (Heb. xi. 11). Sometimes it is adduced as bringing strong consolation to souls conscious of their own feeble and fluctuating faith, as when Paul tells Timothy that 'If we are faithless, He abideth faithful: for He cannot deny Himself' (2 Tim. ii. 13). Sometimes it is presented as an anodyne to souls disturbed by experience of men's unreliableness, as when the apostle heartens the Thessalonians and himself to bear human untrustworthiness by the thought that though men are faithless, God 'is faithful, who shall establish you and keep you from evil' (2 Thess. iii. 2, 3). Sometimes it is put forward to breathe patience into tempted spirits, as when the Corinthians are comforted by the assurance that 'God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able' (1 Cor. x. 13). Sometimes it is laid as the firm foundation for our assurance of pardon, as when John tells us that 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins' (1 John i. 9). And sometimes that great attribute of the divine nature is proposed as holding forth a pattern for us to follow, and the faith in it as tending to make us in a measure steadfast like Himself, as when Paul indignantly rebuts his enemies' charge of levity of purpose and vacillation, and avers that 'as God is faithful, our word toward you is not yea and nay' (2 Cor. i. 18).

THE LESSON OF MEMORY

'Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments, or no.'—DEUT. viii. 2.

THE strand of our lives usually slips away smoothly enough, but days such as this, the last Sunday in a year, are like the knots on a sailor's log, which, as they pass through his fingers, tell him how fast it is being paid out from the reel, and how far it has run off.

They suggest a momentary consciousness of the swift passage of life, and naturally lead us to a glance backwards and forwards, both of which occupations ought to be very good for us. The dead flat upon which some of us live may be taken as an emblem of the low present in which most of us are content to pass our lives, affording nowhere a distant view, and never enabling us to see more than a street's length ahead of us. It is a good thing to get up upon some little elevation and take a wider view, backwards and forwards.

And so now I venture to let the season preach to us, and to confine myself simply to suggesting for you one or two very plain and obvious thoughts which may help to make our retrospect wise and useful. And there are two main considerations which I wish to submit. The first is—what we ought to be chiefly occupied with as we look back; and secondly, what the issue of such a retrospect ought to be.

I. With what we should be mainly occupied as we look back. Memory, like all other faculties, may either help us or hinder us. As is the man, so will be his remembrance. The tastes which rule his present will determine the things that he likes best to think about in the past. There are many ways of going wrong in our retrospects. Some of us, for instance, prefer to think with pleasure about things that ought never to have been done, and to give a wicked immortality to thoughts that ought never to have had a being. Some men's tastes and inclinations are so vitiated and corrupted that they find a joy in living their badnesses over again. Some of us, looking back on the days that are gone, select by instinctive preference for remembrance, the vanities and frivolities and trifles which were the main things in them whilst they lasted. Such a use of the great faculty of memory is like the folly of the Egyptians who embalmed cats and vermin. Do not let us be of those, who have in their memories nothing but rubbish, or something worse, who let down the drag-net into the depths of the past and bring it up full only of mud and foulnesses, and of ugly monsters that never ought to have been dragged into the daylight.

Then there are some of us who abuse memory just as much by picking out, with perverse ingenuity, every black bit that lies in the distance behind us, all the disappointments, all the losses, all the pains, all the sorrows. Some men look back and say, with Jacob in one of his moods, 'Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life!' Yes! and the same man, when he was in a better spirit, said, and a great deal more truly, 'The God that fed me all my life long, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil.' Do not paint like Rembrandt, even if you do not paint like Turner. Do not dip your brush only in the blackness, even if you cannot always dip it in molten sunshine.

And there are some of us who, in like manner, spoil all the good that we could get out of a wise retrospect, by only looking back in such a fashion as to feed a sentimental melancholy, which is, perhaps, the most profitless of all the ways of looking backwards.

Now here are the two points, in this verse of my text, which would put all these blunders and all others right, telling us what we should chiefly think about when we look back, and from what point of view the retrospect of the past must be taken in order that it should be salutary. 'Thou shalt remember all the way by which the Lord thy God hath led thee.' Let memory work under the distinct recognition of divine guidance in every part of the past. That is the *first* condition of making the retrospect blessed. 'To humble thee and to prove thee, and to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments, or no'; let us look back with a clear recognition of the fact that the use of life is to test, and reveal, and to make, character. This world, and all its outward engagements, duties, and occupations, is but a scaffolding, on which the builders may stand to rear the true temple, and when the building is reared you may do what you like with the scaffolding. So we have to look back on life from this point of view, that its joys and sorrows, its ups and downs, its work and repose, the vicissitudes and sometimes contrariety of its circumstances and conditions, are all for the purpose of making *us*, and of making plain to ourselves, what we are. 'To humble thee,' that is, to knock the self-confidence out of us, and to bring us to say: 'I am nothing and Thou art everything; I myself am a poor weak rag of a creature that needs Thy hand to stiffen me, or I shall not be able to resist or to do.' That is one main lesson that life is meant to teach us. Whoever has learnt to say by reason of the battering and shocks of time, by reason of sorrows and failures, by reason of joys, too, and fruition,—'Lord, I come to Thee as depending upon Thee for everything,' has wrung its supreme good out of life, and has fulfilled the purpose of the Father, who has led us all these years, to humble us into the wholesome diffidence that says: 'Not in myself, but in Thee are all my strength and my hope.'

I need not do more than remind you of the other cognate purposes which are suggested here. Life is meant, not only to bring us to humble self-distrust, as a step towards devout dependence on God, but also to reveal us to ourselves; for we only know what we are by reflecting on what we have done, and the only path by which self-knowledge can be attained is the path of observant recollection of our conduct in daily life.

Another purpose for which the whole panorama of life is made to pass before us, and for which all the gymnastic of life exercises us, is that we may be made submissive to the great Will, and may keep His commandments.

These thoughts should be with us in our retrospect, and then our retrospect will be blessed: First, we are to look back and see God's guidance everywhere, and second, we are to judge of the things that we remember by their tendency to make character, to make us humble, to reveal us to ourselves, and to knit us in glad obedience to our Father God.

II. And now turn to the other consideration which may help to make remembrance a good, viz., the issues to which our retrospect must tend, if it is to be anything more than sentimental recollection.

First, let me say: Remember and be thankful. If what I have been saying as to the standard by which events are to be tried be true; if it be the case that the main fact about things is their power to mould persons and to make character, then there follows, very plainly and clearly, that all things that come within the sweep of our memory may equally contribute to our highest good.

Good does not mean pleasure. Bright-being may not always be well-being, and the highest good has a very much nobler meaning than comfort and satisfaction. And so, realising the fact that the best of things is that they shall make us like God, then we can turn to the past and judge it wisely, because then we shall see that all the diversity, and even the opposition, of circumstances and events, may co-operate towards the same end. Suppose two wheels in a great machine, one turns from right to left and the other from left to right, but they fit into one another, and they both produce one final result of motion. So the moments in my life which I call blessings and gladness, and the moments in my life which I call sorrows and tortures, may work into each other, and they will do so if I take hold of them rightly, and use them as they ought to be used. They will tend to the highest good whether they be light or dark; even as night with its darkness and its dews has its ministration and mission of mercy for the wearied eye no less than day with its brilliancy and sunshine; even as the summer and the winter are equally needful, and equally good for the crop. So in our lives it is good for us, sometimes, that we be brought into the dark places; it is good for us sometimes that the leaves be stripped from the trees, and the ground be bound with frost.

And so for both kinds of weather, dear brethren, we have to remember and be thankful. It is a hard lesson, I know, for some of us. There may be some listening to me whose memory goes back to this dying year as the year that has held the sorest sorrow of their lives; to whom it has brought some loss that has made earth dark. And it seems hard to tell quivering lips to be thankful, and to bid a man be grateful though his eyes fill with tears as he looks back on such a past. But yet it is true that it is good for us to be drawn, or to be driven, to Him; it is good for us to have to tread even a lonely path if it makes us lean more on the arm of our Beloved. It is good for us to have places made empty if, as in the year when Israel's King died, we shall thereby have our eyes purged to behold the Lord sitting on the Royal Seat.

> 'Take it on trust a little while,
> Thou soon shalt read the mystery right,
> In the full sunshine of His smile.'

And for the present let us try to remember that He dwelleth in the darkness as in the light, and that we are to be thankful for the things that help us to be near Him, and not only for the things that make us outwardly glad. So I venture to say even to those of you who may be struggling with sad remembrances, remember and be thankful.

I have no doubt there are many of us who have to look back, if not upon a year desolated by some blow that never can be repaired, yet upon a year in which failing resources and declining business, or diminished health, or broken spirits, or a multitude of minute but most disturbing cares and sorrows, do make it hard to recognise the loving Hand in all that comes. Yet to such, too, I would say: 'All things work together for good,' therefore all things are to be embraced in the thankfulness of our retrospect.

The second and simple practical suggestion that I make is this: Remember, and let the memory lead to contrition. Perhaps I am speaking to some men or women for whom this dying year holds the memory of some great lapse from goodness; some young man who for the first time has been tempted to sensuous sin; some man who may have been led into slippery places in regard to business integrity. I draw a 'bow at a venture' when I speak of such things—perhaps some one is listening to me who would give a great deal if he or she could forget a certain past moment of this dying year, which makes their cheeks hot yet whilst they think of it. To such I say: Remember, go close into the presence of the black thing, and get the consciousness of it driven into your heart; for such remembrance is the first step to deliverance from the load, and to your passing, emancipated from the bitterness, into the year that lies before you.

But even if there are none of us to whom such remarks would specially apply, let us summon up to ourselves the memories of these bygone days. In all the three hundred and sixty-five of them, my friend, how many moments stand out distinct before you as moments of high communion with God? How many times can you remember of devout consecration to Him? How many, when—as visitors to the Riviera reckon the number of days in the season in which, far across the water, they have seen Corsica—you can remember this year to have beheld, faint and far away, 'the mountains that are round about' the 'Jerusalem that is above'? How many moments do you remember of consecration and service, of devotion to your God and your fellows? Oh! what a miserable, low-lying stretch of God-forgetting monotony our lives look when we are looking back at them in the mass. One film of mist is scarcely perceptible, but when you get a mile of it you can tell what it is—oppressive darkness. One drop of muddy water does not show its pollution, but when you have a pitcherful of it you can see how thick it is. And so a day or an hour looked back upon may not reveal the true godlessness of the average life, but if you will take the twelvemonth and think about it, and ask yourself a question or two about it, I think you will feel that the only attitude for any of us in looking back across a stretch of such brown barren moorland is that of penitent prayer for forgiveness and for cleansing.

But I dare say that some of you say: 'Oh! I look back and I do not feel anything of that kind of regret that you describe; I have done my duty, and nobody can blame me. I am quite comfortable in my retrospect. Of course there have been imperfections; we are all human, and these need not trouble a man.' Let me ask you, dear brother, one question: Do you believe that the law of a man's life is, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself'? Do you believe that that is what you ought to do? Have you done it? If you have not, let me beseech you not to go out of this year, across the artificial and imaginary boundary that separates you from the next, with the old guilt upon your back, but go to Jesus Christ, and ask Him to forgive you, and then you may pass into the coming twelvemonth without the intolerable burden of unremembered, unconfessed, and therefore unforgiven, sin.

The next point that I would suggest is this: Let us remember in order that from the retrospect we may gain practical wisdom. It is astonishing what unteachable, untamable creatures men are. They learn wisdom about all the little matters of daily life by experience, but they do not seem to do so about the higher. Even a sparrow comes to understand a scarecrow after a time or two, and any rat in a hole will learn the trick of a trap. But you can trick men over and over again with the same inducement, and, even whilst the hook is sticking in their jaws, the same bait will tempt them once more. That is very largely the case because they do not observe and remember what has happened to them in bygone days.

There are two things that any man, who will bring his reason and common-sense to bear upon the honest estimate and retrospect of the facts of his life, may be fully convinced of. These are, first, his own weakness. One main use of a wise retrospect is to teach us where we are weakest. What an absurd thing it would be if the inhabitants of a Dutch village were to let the sea come in at the same gap in the same dyke a dozen times! What an absurd thing it would be if a city were captured over and over again by assaults at the same point, and did not strengthen its defences there! But that is exactly what you do; and all the while, if you would only think about your own past lives wisely and reasonably, and like men with brains in your heads, you might find out where it was that you were most open to attack; what it was in your character that most needed strengthening, what it was wherein the devil caught you most quickly, and might so build yourselves up in the most defenceless points.

Do not look back for sentimental melancholy; do not look back with unavailing regrets; do not look back to torment yourselves with useless self-accusation; but look back to see how good God has been, and look back to see where you are weak, and pile the wall higher there, and so learn practical wisdom from retrospect.

Another phase of the practical wisdom which memory should give is deliverance from the illusions of sense and time. Remember how little the world has ever done for you in bygone days. Why should you let it befool you once again? If it has proved itself a liar when it has tempted you with gilded offers that came to nothing, and with beauty that was no more solid than the 'Easter-eggs' that you buy in the shops—painted sugar with nothing inside—why should you believe it when it comes to you once more? Why not say: 'Ah! once burnt, twice shy! You have tried that trick on me before, and I have found it out!' Let the retrospect teach us how hollow life is without God, and so let it draw us near to Him.

The last thing that I would say is: 'Let us remember that we may hope. It is the prerogative of Christian remembrance, that it merges into Christian hope. The forward look and the backward look are really but the exercise of the same faculty in two different directions. Memory does not always imply hope, we remember sometimes because we do not hope, and try to gather round ourselves the vanished past because we know it never again can be a present or a future. But when we are occupied with an unchanging Friend, whose love is inexhaustible, and whose arm is unwearied, it is good logic to say: 'It has been, therefore it shall be.'

With regard to this fleeting life, it is a delusion to say 'to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant'; but with regard to the life of the soul that lives in God, that is true, and true for ever. The past is a specimen of the future. The future for the man who lives in Christ is but the prolongation, and the heightening into superlative excellence and beauty, of all that is good in the past and in the present. As the radiance of some rising sun may cast its bright beams into the opposite sky, even so the glowing past behind us flings its purples and its golds and its scarlets on to the else dim curtain of the future.

Remember that you may hope. A paradox, but a paradox that is a truth in the case of Christians whose memory is of a God that has loved and blessed them.

whose hope is in a God that changes never; whose memory is charged with 'every good and perfect gift that came down from the Father of Lights,' whose hope is in that same Father, 'with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.' So on every stone of remembrance, every Ebenezer on which is graved: 'Hitherto hath the Lord helped us,' we can mount a telescope—if I may so say—that will look into the furthest glories of the heavens, and be sure that the past will be magnified and perpetuated in the future. Our prayer may legitimately be: 'Thou hast been my help, leave me not, neither forsake me!' And His answer will be: 'I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.' Remember that you may hope, and hope because you remember.

THE EATING OF THE PEACE-OFFERING

'But thou must eat them before the Lord thy God in the place which the Lord thy God shall choose, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that is within thy gates: and thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God in all that thou puttest thine hands unto.'—Deut. xii. 18.

There were three bloody sacrifices, the sin-offering, the burnt-offering, and the peace-offering. In all three expiation was the first idea, but in the second of them the act of burning symbolised a further thought, namely, that of offering to God, while in the third, the peace-offering, there was added to both of these the still further thought of the offerer's participation with God, as symbolised by the eating of the sacrifice. So we have great verities of the most spiritual religion adumbrated in this external rite. The rind is hard and forbidding, the kernel is juicy and sweet.

I. Communion with God based on atonement.

II. Feeding on Christ.

What was sacrifice becomes food. The same Person and facts, apprehended by faith, are, in regard to their bearing on the divine government, the ground of pardon, and in regard to their operation within us, the source of spiritual sustenance. Christ for us is our pardon; Christ in us is our life.

III. The restoration to the offerer of all which he lays on God's altar.

The sacrifice was transformed and elevated into a sacrament. By being offered the sacrifice was ennobled. The offerer did not lose what he laid on the altar, but it came back to him, far more precious than before. It was no longer mere food for the body, and to eat it became not an ordinary meal, but a sacrament and means of union with God. It was a hundredfold more the offerer's even in this life. All its savour was more savoury, all its nutritive qualities were more nutritious. It had suffered a fiery change, and was turned into something more rich and rare.

That is blessedly true as to all which we lay on God's altar. It is far more ours than it ever was or could be, while we kept it for ourselves, and our enjoyment of, and nourishment from, our good things, when offered as sacrifices, are greater than when we eat our morsel alone. If we make earthly joys and possessions the materials of our sacrifice, they will not only become more joyful and richer, but they will become means of closer union with Him, instead of parting us from Him, as they do when used in selfish disregard of Him.

Nor must we forget the wonderful thought, also mirrored in this piece of ancient ritual, that God delights in men's sacrifices and surrenders and services. 'If I were hungry, I would not tell thee,' said the

Psalmist in God's name in regard to outward sacrifices; 'Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?' But he does 'eat' the better sacrifices that loving hearts or obedient wills lay on His altar. He seeks for these, and delights when they are offered to Him. 'He hungered, and seeing a fig tree by the wayside, He came to it.' He still hungers for the fruit that we can yield to Him, and if we will, He will enter in and sup with us, not disdaining to sit at the poor table which we can spread for Him, nor to partake of the humble fare which we can lay upon it, but mending the banquet by what He brings for *our* nourishment, and hallowing the hour by His presence.

PROPHETS AND THE PROPHET

'When thou art come into the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. 10. There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, 11. Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. 12. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord: and because of these abominations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee. 13. Thou shalt be perfect with the Lord thy God. 14. For these nations, which thou shalt possess, hearkened unto observers of times, and unto diviners: but as for thee, the Lord thy God hath not suffered thee so to do. 15. The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him ye shall hearken; 16. According to all that thou desiredst of the Lord thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. 17. And the Lord said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. 18. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put My words in His mouth; and He shall speak unto them all that I shall command Him. 19. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto My words which He shall speak in My name, I will require it of him. 20. But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. 21. And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? 22. When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.'—DEUT. xviii. 9-22.

It is evident from the connection in which the promise of 'a prophet like unto Moses' is here introduced that it does not refer to Jesus only; for it is presented as Israel's continuous defence against the temptation of seeking knowledge of the divine will by the illegitimate methods of divination, soothsaying, necromancy, and the like, which were rampant among the inhabitants of the land. A distant hope of a prophet in the far-off future could afford no motive to shun these superstitions. We cannot understand this passage unless we recognise that the direct reference is to the institution of the prophetic order as the standing means of imparting the reliable knowledge of God's will, possessing which, Israel had no need to turn to them 'that peep and mutter' and bring false oracles from imagined gods. But that primary reference of the words does not exclude, but rather demands, their ultimate reference to Him in whom the divine word is perfectly enshrined, and who is the bright, consummate flower of the prophetic order, which 'spake of Him,' not only in its individual predictions, but by its very existence.

A glance must be given to the exhaustive list of pretenders to knowledge of the future or to power of shaping it magically, which occurs in verses 10, 11, and suggests a terrible picture of the burdens of superstition which weighed on men in these days of ignorance, as the like burdens do still, wherever Jesus is not known as the one Revealer of God, and the sole Lord of all things. Of the eight terms employed, the first three refer to different means of reading the future, the next two to different means of influencing events, and the last three to different ways of consulting the dead. The first of these eight properly refers to drawing lots, but includes other methods; the second is an obscure word, which is supposed by some to mean a 'murmurer,' and may refer rather to the low mutterings of the soothsayer than to the method of his working; the third is probably a general expression for an interpreter of omens, especially of those given by the play of liquid in a 'cup,' such as Joseph 'divined' by.

Two names for magicians follow, of which the former seems to mean one who worked with charms such as African or American Indian 'medicine men' use, and the latter, one who binds by incantations, or one who ties magic knots, which are supposed to have the power of hindering the designs of the person against whom they are directed. The word employed means 'binding,' and may be used either literally or metaphorically. The malicious tying of knots in order to work harm is not dead yet in some backward corners of Britain. Then follow three names for traffickers with spirits,—those who raise ghosts as did the witch of Endor, those who have a 'familiar spirit,' and those who in any way consult the dead. It is a grim catalogue, bearing witness to the deep-rooted longing in men to peer into the darkness ahead, and to get some knowledge of the purposes of the awful unseen Power who rules there. The longing is here recognised as legitimate, while the methods are branded as bad, and Israel is warned from them, by being pointed to the merciful divine institution which meets the longing.

It is clear, from this glance at the context, that the 'prophet' promised to Israel must mean the order, not the individual; and it is interesting to note, first, the relation in which that order is presented as standing towards all that rabble of diviners and sorcerers, with their rubbish of charms and muttered spells. It sweeps them off the field, because it is truly what they pretend to be. God knows men's longings, and God will meet them so far as meeting them is for men's good. But the characteristics of the prophet are set in strong contrast to those of the diviners and magicians, and lift the order high above all the filth and folly of these others. First, the prophet is 'raised up' by God; the individual holder of the office has his 'call' and does not 'prophesy out of his own heart.' The man who takes this office on himself without such a call is *ipso facto* branded as a false prophet. Then he is 'from the midst of thee, of thy brethren,'—springing from the people, not an alien, like so many of these wandering soothsayers, but with the national life throbbing in his veins, and himself participant of the thoughts and emotions of his brethren. Then he is to be 'like unto' Moses,—not in all points, but in his receiving direct communications from God, and in his authority as God's messenger. The crowning characteristic, 'I will put My words into his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him,' invests his words with divine authority, calls for obedience to them as the words of God Himself, widens out his sphere far beyond that of merely foretelling, brings in the moral and religious element which had no place in the oracles of the soothsayer, and opens up the prospect of a continuous progressive revelation throughout the ages ('all that I *shall* command him'). We mutilate the grand idea of the prophet in Israel if we think of his work as mainly prediction, and we mutilate it no less if we exclude prediction from it. We mutilate it still more fatally if we try to account for it on naturalistic principles, and fail to see in the prophet a man directly conscious of a divine call, or to hear in his words the solemn accents of the voice of God.

The loftiness and the limitations of 'the goodly fellowship of the prophets' alike point onwards to

Jesus Christ. In Him, and in Him alone, the idea of the prophet is fully realised. The imperfect embodiments of it in the past were prophecies as well as prophets. The fact that God has 'spoken unto the fathers by the prophets,' leads us to expect that He will speak 'to us in a Son,' and that not by fragments of His mighty voice, but in one full, eternal, all-embracing and all-sufficient Word. Every divine idea, which has been imperfectly manifested in fragmentary and sinful men and in the material creation, is completely incarnated in Him. He is the King to whom the sins and the saintlinesses of Israel's kings alike pointed. He is the Priest, whom Aaron and his sons foreshadowed, who perfectly exercises the sympathy which they could only feel partially, because they were compassed with infirmity and self-regard, and who offers the true sacrifice of efficacy higher than 'the blood of bulls and goats.' He is the Prophet, who makes all other means of knowing the divine will unnecessary, hearing whom we hear the very voice of God speaking in His gentle words of love, in His authoritative words of command, in His illuminating words of wisdom, and speaking yet more loudly and heart-touchingly in the eloquence of deeds no less than divine; who is 'not ashamed to call us brethren,' and is 'bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh'; who is like, but greater than, the great lawgiver of Israel, being the Son and Lord of the 'house' in which Moses was but a servant. 'To Him give all the prophets witness,' and the greatest of them was honoured when, with Moses, Elijah stood on the Mount of Transfiguration, subordinate and attesting, and then faded away when the voice proclaimed, 'This is My beloved Son, hear Him,'—and they 'saw no one save Jesus only.'

A CHOICE OF MASTERS

'Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things; 48. Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies . . . in want of all things: and He shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until He have destrôyed thee.'—DEUT. xxviii. 47, 48.

THE history of Israel is a picture on the large scale of what befalls every man.

A service—we are all born to obedience, to depend on and follow some person or thing. There is only a choice of services; and he who boasts himself free is but a more abject slave, as the choice for a nation is either the rule of settled order and the sanctities of an established law, or the usurpation of a mob and the intolerable tyranny of unbridled and irresponsible force.

I. The service of God or the service of our enemies.

Israel was the servant in turn of Egypt, Philistia, Edom, Assyria, Babylon, Syria, and Rome. It was every invader's prey. God's invisible arm was its only guard from these, and an all-sufficient guard as long as it leaned on Him. When it turned from Him it fell under their yoke. Its lawful Lord loved it; its tyrants hated it.

So with us. We have to serve God or enemies. Our lusts, our passions, the world, evil habits—in a word, our sins ring us round. God is the only defence against them.

The contrast between the one and the many—a king or an ochlocracy. The contrast of the loving Lord and the hostile sins.

II. A service which is honour or a service which is degradation.

God alone is worthy of our absolute submission and service. How low a man sinks when he is ruled by any lesser authority! Such obedience is a crime against the dignity of human nature, and the soul is not without a galling sense of this now and then, when its chains rattle.

III. A service which is freedom because it is rendered by love, or a service which is hard slavery.

'With joy for the abundance of all things.' How sin palls upon us, and yet we commit it. The will is overborne, conscience is stifled.

IV. A service which feeds the spirit or a service which starves it.

The soul can only in God get what it wants. Prison fare is what it receives in the other service. The unsatisfying character of all sin; it cloys, and yet leaves one hungry. It is 'that which satisfieth not.' 'Broken cisterns which hold no water.'

V. A service which is life or a service which is death.

The dark forebodings of the text grow darker as it goes on. The grim slavery which it threatens as the only alternative to joyful service of God is declared to be lifelong 'penal servitude,' and not only is there no deliverance from it, but it directly tends to wear away the life of the hopeless slaves. For the words that follow our text are 'and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee.' That is dismally true in regard to any and every life that has shaken off the service of God which is perfect freedom, and has persisted in the service of sin. Such service is suicidal; it rivets an iron yoke on our necks, and there is no locksmith who can undo the shackles and lift it off, so long as we refuse to take service with God. Stubbornly rebellious wills forge their own fetters. Like many a slave-owner, our tyrants have a cruel delight in killing their slaves, and our sins not only lead to death, but are themselves death.

But there is a bright possibility before the most down-trodden vassal of sin. 'The bond-servant abideth not in the house for ever.' He is not a son of the house, but has been brought into it, stolen from his home. He may be carried back to his Father's house, and there 'have bread enough and to spare,' if a deliverer can be found. And He has been found. Christ the Son makes us free, and if we trust Him for our emancipation we 'shall be free indeed,' 'that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, should serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.'

THE SPIRIT OF THE LAW

'For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. 12. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? 13. Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? 14. But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it. 15. See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; 16. In that I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the Lord thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. 17. But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; 18. I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it. 19. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: 20. That thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey His voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto Him: for He is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.'—DEUT. xxx. 11-20.

THIS paragraph closes the legislation of this book, the succeeding chapters being in the nature of an epilogue or appendix. It sums up the whole law, makes plain its inmost essence and its tremendous alternatives. As in the closing strains of some great symphony, the themes which have run through the preceding movements are woven together in the final burst of music. Let us try to discover the component threads of the web.

The first point to note is the lofty conception of the true essence of the whole law, which is enshrined here. 'This commandment which I command thee this day' is twice defined in the section (vs. 16, 20), and in both instances 'to love Jehovah thy God' is presented as the all-important precept. Love is recognised as the great commandment. Leviticus may deal with minute regulations for worship, but these are subordinate, and the sovereign commandment is love. Nor is the motive which should sway to love omitted; for what a tender drawing by the memories of what He had done for Israel is put forth in the name of 'Jehovah, *thy* God!' The Old Testament system is a spiritual system, and it too places the very heart of religion in love to God, drawn out by the contemplation of his self-revelation in his loving dealings with us. We have here clearly recognised that the obedience which pleases God is obedience born of love, and that the love which really sets towards God will, like a powerful stream, turn all the wheels of life in conformity to His will. When Paul proclaimed that 'love is the fulfilling of the law,' he was only repeating the teaching of this passage, when it puts 'to walk in His ways,' or 'to obey His voice,' after 'to love Jehovah thy God.' Obedience is the result and test of love; love is the only parent of real obedience.

The second point strongly insisted on here is the blessedness of possessing such a knowledge as the law gives. Verses 11-14 present that thought in three ways. The revelation is not that of duties far beyond our capacity: 'It is not too hard for thee.' No doubt, complete conformity with it is beyond our powers, and entire, whole-hearted, and whole-souled love of God is not attained even by those who love Him most. Paul's position that the law gives the knowledge of sin, just because it presents an impossible elevation in its ideal, is not opposed to the point of view of this context; for he is thinking of complete conformity as impossible, while it is thinking of real, though imperfect, obedience as within the reach of all men. No man can love as he ought; every man can love. It is blessed to have our obligations all gathered into such a commandment.

Again, the possession of the law is a blessing, because its authoritative voice ends the weary quest after some reliable guide to conduct, and we need neither try to climb to heaven, nor to traverse the wide world and cross the ocean, to find certitude and enlightenment enough for our need. They err who think of God's commandments as grievous burdens; they are merciful guide-posts. They do not so much lay weights on our backs as give light to our eyes.

Still further, the law has its echo 'in thy heart.' It is 'graven on the fleshly tables of the heart,' and we all respond to it when it gathers up all duty into 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God,' and our consciences say to it, 'Thou speakest well.' The worst man knows it better than the best man keeps it. Blurred and illegible often, like the half-defaced inscriptions disinterred from the rubbish mounds that once were Nineveh or Babylon, that law remains written on the hearts of all men.

A further point to be well laid to heart is the merciful plainness and emphasis with which the issues that are suspended on obedience or disobedience are declared. The solemn alternatives are before every man that hears. Life or death, blessing or cursing, are held out to him, and it is for him to elect which shall be realised in his case. Of course, it may be said that the words 'life' and 'death' are here used in their merely physical sense, and that the context shows (vs. 17, 18) that life here means only 'length of days, that thou mayest dwell in the land.' No doubt that is so, though we can scarcely refuse to see some glimmer of a deeper conception gleaming through the words, 'He is thy life,' though it is but a glimmer. We have no space here to enter upon the question of how far it is now true that obedience brings material blessings. It was true for Israel, as many a sad experience that it was a bitter as well as an evil thing to forsake Jehovah was to show in the future. But though the connection between well-doing and material gain is not so clear now, it is by no means abrogated, either for nations or for individuals. Moral and religious law has social and economic consequences, and though the perplexed distribution of earthly good and ill often bewilders faith and emboldens scepticism, there still is visible in human affairs a drift towards recompensing in the world the righteous and the wicked.

But to us, with our Christian consciousness, 'life' means more than living, and 'He is our life' in a deeper and more blessed sense than that our physical existence is sustained by His continual energy. The love of God and consequent union with Him give us the only true life. Jesus is 'our life,' and He enters the spirit which opens to Him by faith, and communicates to it a spark of His own immortal life. He that is joined to Jesus lives; he that is separated from Him 'is dead while he liveth.'

The last point here is the solemn responsibility for choosing one's part, which the revelation of the law brings with it. 'I have set before thee life and death, the blessing and the curse, therefore choose life.' We each determine for ourselves whether the knowledge of what we ought to be will lead to life or to death, and by choosing obedience we choose life. Every ray of light from God is capable of producing a double effect. It either gladdens or pains, it either gives vision or blindness. The gospel, which is the perfect revelation of God in Christ, brings every one of us face to face with the great alternative, and urgently demands from each his personal act of choice whether he will accept it or neglect or reject it. Not to choose to accept *is* to choose to reject. To do nothing is to choose death. The knowledge of the law was not enough, and neither is an intellectual reception of the gospel. The one bred Pharisees, who were 'whited sepulchres'; the other breeds orthodox professors, who have 'a name to live and are dead.' The clearer our light, the heavier our responsibility. If we are to live, we have to 'choose life'; and if we do not, by the vigorous exercise of our will, turn away from earth and self, and take Jesus for our Saviour and Lord, loving and obeying whom we love and obey God, we have effectually chosen a worse death than that of the body, and flung away a better life than that of earth.

GOD'S TRUE TREASURE IN MAN

'The Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance.'—DEUT. xxxii. 9.

'Jesus Christ (Who) gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people.'—TITUS ii. 14.

I CHOOSE these two texts because they together present us with the other side of the thought to that which I have elsewhere considered, that man's true treasure is in God. That great axiom of the religious consciousness, which pervades the whole of Scripture, is rapturously expressed in many a psalm, and never more assuredly than in that one which struggles up from the miry clay in which the Psalmist's 'steps had well-nigh slipped' and soars and sings thus: 'The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup; Thou maintainest my lot,' 'The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.'

You observe the correspondence between these words and those of my first text: 'The Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance.' The correspondence in the original is not quite so marked as it is in our Authorised Version, but still the idea in the two passages is the same. Now it is plain that persons can possess persons only by love, sympathy, and communion. From that it follows that the possession must be mutual; or, in other words, that only he can say 'Thou art mine' who can say 'I am Thine.' And so to possess God, and to be possessed by God, are but two ways of putting the same fact. 'The Lord is the portion of His people, and the Lord's portion is His people,' are only two ways of stating the same truth.

Then my second text clearly quotes the well-known utterance that lies at the foundation of the national life of Israel: 'Ye shall be unto Me a peculiar treasure above all people,' and claims that privilege, like all Israel's privileges, for the Christian Church. In like manner Peter (1 Pet. ii. 9) quotes the same words, 'a peculiar people,' as properly applying to Christians. I need scarcely remind you that 'peculiar' here is used in its proper original sense of belonging to, or, as the Revised Version gives it, 'a people for God's own possession,' and has no trace of the modern signification of 'singular.' Similarly we find Paul in his Epistle to the Ephesians giving both sides of the idea of the inheritance in intentional juxtaposition, when he speaks (i. 14) of the 'earnest of our inheritance . . . unto the redemption of God's own possession.' In the words before us we have the same idea; and this text besides tells us how Christ, the Revealer of God, wins men for Himself, and what manner of men they must be whom He counts as His.

Therefore there are, as I take it, three things to be spoken about now. First, God has a special ownership in some people. Second, God owns these people because He has given Himself to them. Third, God possesses, and is possessed by, His inheritance, that He may give and receive services of love. Or, in briefer words, I have to speak about this wonderful thought of a special divine ownership, what it rests upon, and what it involves.

I. God has special ownership in some people.

'The Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance.' Put side by side with those other words of the Old Testament: 'All souls are Mine,' or the utterance of the 100th Psalm rightly translated: 'It is He that hath made us, and to Him we belong.' There is a right of absolute and utter ownership and possession inherent in the very relation of Creator and creature; so that the being made is wholly and altogether at the disposal, and is the property. of Him that makes him.

But is that enough for God's heart? Is that worth calling ownership at all? An arbitrary tyrant in an unconstitutional kingdom, or a slave-owner, may have the most absolute right of property over his subject or his slave; may have the right of entire disposal of all his industry, of the profit of all his labour; may be able to do anything he likes with him, may have the power of life and death; but such ownership is only of the husk and case of a man: the man himself may be free, and may smile at the claim of possession. 'They may' *own* 'the body, and after that have no more than they can do.' That kind of authority and ownership, absolute and utter, to the point of death, may satisfy a tyrant or a slave-driver, it does not satisfy the loving heart of God. It is not real possession at all. In what sense did Nero own Paul when he shut him up in prison, and cut his head off? Does the slave-owner own the man whom he whips within an inch of his life, and who dare not do anything without his permission? Does God, in any sense that corresponds with the longing of infinite love, own the men that reluctantly obey Him, and are simply, as it were, tools in His hands? He covets and longs for a deeper relationship and tenderer ties, and though all creatures are His, and all men are His servants and His possession, yet, like certain regiments in our own British army, there are some who have the right to bear in a special manner on their uniform and on their banners the emblazonment, 'The King's Own.' 'The Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance.'

Well, then, the next thought is that the special relationship of possession is constituted by mutual love. I said at the beginning of these remarks that as concerns men's relations, the only real possession is through love, sympathy, and communion, and that that must necessarily be mutual. We have a perfect right to apply the human analogy here; in fact, we are bound to do it if we would rightly understand such words as those of my text; and it just leads us to this, that the one thing whereby God reckons that He possesses a man at all is when His love falls upon that man's heart and soaks into it, and when there springs up in the heart a corresponding emotion and affection. The men who welcome the divine love that goes through the whole world, seeking such to worship it, and to trust it, and to become its own; and who therefore lovingly yield to the loving divine will, and take it for their law—these are the men whom He regards as His 'portion' and 'the lot of His inheritance.' So that God is mine, and that 'I am God's,' are two ends of one truth; 'I possess Him,' and 'I am possessed by Him,' are but the statement of one fact expressed from two points of view. In the one case you look upon it from above, in the other case you look upon it from beneath. All the sweet commerce of mutual surrender and possession which makes the joy of our hearts, in friendship and in domestic life, we have the right to lift up into this loftier region, and find in it the last teaching of what makes the special bond of mutual possession between God and man.

And deep words of Scripture point in that direction. Those parables of our Lord's: the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son, in their infinite beauty, whilst they contain a great deal besides this, do contain this in their several ways; the money, the animal, the man belong to the woman of the house, to the shepherd, to the father. Each is 'lost' in a different fashion, but the most clear revelation is given in the last parable of the three, which explains the other two. The son was 'lost,' when he did not love the father; and he was 'found' by the father when he returned the yearning of the father's heart.

And so, dear brethren, it ever is; the one thing that knits men to God is that the silken cord of love let down from Heaven should by our own hand be wrapped round our own hearts, and then we are united to Him. We are His and He is ours by the double action of His love manifested by Him, and His love received by us.

Now there is nothing in all that of favouritism. The declaration that there are people who have a special relationship to the divine heart may be so stated as to have a very ugly look, and it often has been so stated as to be nothing more than self-complacent Pharisaism, which values a privilege principally because its possession is an insult to somebody else that has it not.

There has been plenty of Christianity of that sort in the world, but there is nothing of it in the thoughts of these texts rightly looked at. There is only this: it cannot but be that men who yield to God and love Him, and try to live near Him and to do righteousness, are His in a manner that those who steel themselves against Him and turn away from Him are not. Whilst all creatures have a place in His heart, and are flooded with His benefits, and get as much of Him as they can hold, the men who recognise the source of their blessing, and turn to it with grateful hearts, are nearer Him than those that do not do so. Let us take care, lest for the sake of seeming to preserve the impartiality of His love, we have destroyed all in Him that makes His love worth having. If to Him the good and the bad, the men who fear Him and the men who fear Him not, are equally satisfactory, and, in the same manner, the objects of an equal love, then He is not a God that has pleasure in righteousness; and if He is not a God that 'has pleasure in righteousness,' He is not a God for us to trust to. We are not giving countenance to the notion that God has any step-children, any petted members of His family, when we cleave to this—they that have welcomed His love into their hearts are nearer to Him than those that have closed the door against it.

And there is one more point here about this matter of ownership on which I dwell for a moment, namely, that this conception of certain men being in a special sense God's possession and inheritance means also that He has a special delight in, and lofty appreciation of, them. All this material creation exists for the sake of growing good men and women. That is the use of the things that are seen and temporal; they are like greenhouses built for the great Gardener's use in striking and furthering the growth of His plants; and when He has got the plants He has got what He wanted, and you may pull the greenhouse down if you like. And so God estimates, and teaches us to estimate, the relative value and greatness of the material and the spiritual in this fashion, that He says to us in effect: 'All these magnificences and magnitudes round you are small and vulgar as compared with this—a heart in which wisdom and divine truth and the love and likeness of God have attained to some tolerable measure of maturity and of strength.' These are His 'jewels,' as the Roman matron said about her two boys. The great Father looks upon the men that love Him as His jewels, and, having got the jewels, the rock in which they were embedded and preserved may be crushed when you like. 'They shall be Mine,' saith the Lord, 'My treasures in that day of judgment which I make.'

And so, my brother, all the insignificance of man, as compared with the magnitude and duration of the universe, need not stagger our faith that the divinest thing in the universe is a heart that has learnt to love God and aspires after Him, and should but increase our wonder and our gratitude that He has been mindful of man and has visited him, in order that He might give Himself to men, and so might win men for Himself.

II. That brings me, and very briefly, to the other points that I desire to deal with now. The second one, which is suggested to us from my second text in the Epistle to Titus, is that this possession, by God, of man, like man's possession of God, comes because God has given Himself to man.

The Apostle puts it very strongly in the Epistle to Titus: 'The glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us that He might purify unto Himself a *people for a possession*.' Israel, according to one metaphor, was God's 'son,' begotten by that great redeeming act of deliverance from the captivity of Egypt (Deut. xxxii. 6-19). According to another metaphor, Israel was God's bride, wooed and won for His own by that same act. Both of these figures point to the thought that in order to get man for His own He has to give Himself to man.

And the very height and sublimity of that truth is found in the Christian fact which the Apostle points to here. We need not depart from human analogies here either. Christ gave Himself to us that He might acquire us for Himself. Absolute possession of others is only possible at the price of absolute surrender to them. No human heart ever gave itself away unless it was convinced that the heart to which it gave itself had given itself to it.

And on the lower levels of gratitude and obligation, the only thing that binds a man to another in utter submission is the conviction that that other has given himself in absolute sacrifice for him. A doctor goes into the wards of an hospital with his life in his hands, and because he does, he wins the full confidence and affection of those whom he treats. You cannot buy a heart with anything less than a heart. In the barter of the world it is not 'skin for skin,' but it is 'self for self'; and if you want to own me, you must give yourself altogether to me. And the measure in which teachers and guides and preachers and philanthropists of all sorts make conquests of men is the measure in which they make themselves sacrifices for men.

Now all that is true, and is lifted to its superlative truth, in the great central fact of the Christian faith. But there is more than human analogy here. Christ is not only self-sacrifice in the sense of surrender, but He is sacrifice in the sense of giving Himself for our redemption and forgiveness. He has not only given Himself to us, He has given Himself for us. And there, and on that, is builded, and on that alone has He a right to build, or have we a right to yield to it, His claim to absolute authority and utter command over each of us.

He has died for us, therefore the springs of our life are at His disposal; and the strongest motives which can sway our lives are set in motion by His touch. His death, says this text, redeems us from iniquity and purifies us. That points to its power in delivering us from the service and practice of sin. He buys us from the despot whose slaves we were, and makes us His own in the hatred of evil and the doing of righteousness. Moved by His death, we become capable of heroisms and martyrdoms of devotion to Him. Brethren, it is only as that self-sacrificing love touches us, which died for our sins upon the Cross, that the diabolical chain of selfishness will be broken from our affections and our wills, and we shall be led into the large place of glad surrender of ourselves to the sweetness and the gentle authority of His omnipotent love.

III. The last thought that I suggest is the issues to which this mutual possession points. God owns men, and is owned by them, in order that there may be a giving and receiving of mutual services of love.

'The Lord's portion is His people.' That in the Old Testament is always laid as the foundation of certain obligations under which He has come, and which He will abundantly discharge. What is a great landlord expected to do to his estate? 'What ought I to have done to my vineyard?' the divine Proprietor asks through the mouth of His servant the prophet. He ought to till it, He ought not to starve it, He ought to fence it, He ought to cast a wall about it, He ought to reap the fruits. And He does all that for His inheritance. God's honour is concerned in His portion not being waste. It is not to be a 'garden of the sluggard,' by which people who pass can see the thorns growing there. So He will till it, He will plough it, He will pick out the weeds, and all the disciplines of life will come to us, and the ploughshare will be driven deep into the heart, that 'the peaceable fruit of righteousness' may spring up. He will fence His vineyard. Round about His inheritance His hand will be cast; within His people His Spirit will dwell. No harm shall come near thee if thy love is given to Him; safe and untouched by evil thou shalt walk if thou walk with God. 'He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of Mine eye.' The soul that trusts Him He takes in charge, and before any evil can fall to it 'the pillared firmament must be rottenness, and earth be built on stubble.' 'He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.' 'The Lord's portion is His people,' and 'none shall pluck them out of His hand.'

And on the other side, we belong to God in Christ. What do we owe Him? What does the vineyard owe the husbandman? Fruit. We are His, therefore we are bound to absolute submission. 'Ye are not your own.' Life, circumstances, occupations, all—we hold them at His will. We have no more right of property in anything than a slave in the bad old days had in his cabin and patch of ground. They belonged to the master to whom he belonged. Let us recognise our stewardship, and be glad to know ourselves His, and all events and things which we sometimes think ours, His also.

We are His, therefore we owe absolute trust. The slave has at least this blessing in his lot, that he need have no anxieties; nor need we. We belong to God, and He will take care of us. A rich man's horses and dogs are well cared for, and our Owner will not leave us unheeded. Our well-being involves His good name. Leave anxious thought to masterless hearts which have to front the world with nobody at their backs. If you are God's you will be looked after.

We are His, therefore we are bound to live to His praise. That is the conclusion which one Old Testament passage draws. 'This people have I formed for Myself; they shall show forth My praise' (Isaiah xliii. 21). The Apostle Peter quotes these words immediately after those from Exodus, which describe Israel as 'a people for God's own possession,' when he says 'that ye should show forth the praise of Him who hath called you.' Let us, then, live to His glory, and remember that the servants of the King are bound to stand to their colours amid rebels, and that they who know the sweetness of possessing God, and the blessedness of yielding to His supreme control, should acknowledge what they have found of His goodness, and 'tell forth the honour of His name, and make His praise glorious.' Let not all the magnificent and wonderful expenditure of divine longing and love be in vain, nor run off your hearts like water poured upon a rock. Surely the sun's flames leaping leagues high, they tell us, in tongues of burning gas, must melt everything that is near them. Shall we keep our hearts sullen and cold before such a fire of love? Surely that superb and wonderful manifestation of the love of God in the Cross of Christ should melt into running rivers of gratitude all the ice of our hearts.

'He gave Himself for me!' Let us turn to Him and say: 'Lo! I give myself to Thee. Thou art mine. Make me Thine by the constraint of Thy love, so utterly, and so saturate my spirit with Thyself, that it shall not only be Thine, but in a very deep sense it shall be Thee, and that it may be "no more I that live, but Christ that liveth in me."'

THE EAGLE AND ITS BROOD

'As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings.'—DEUT. xxxii. 11.

THIS is an incomplete sentence in the Authorised Version, but really it should be rendered as a complete one; the description of the eagle's action including only the two first clauses, and (the figure being still retained) the person spoken of in the last clauses being God Himself. That is to say, it should read thus, 'As an eagle stirreth up his nest, fluttereth over his young, *He* spreads abroad His wings, takes them, bears them on His pinions.' That is far grander, as well as more compact, than the somewhat dragging comparison which, according to the Authorised Version, is spread over the whole verse and tardily explained, in the following, by a clause introduced by an unwarranted 'So'—'the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.'

Now, of course, we all know that the original reference of these words is to the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, and their training in the desert. In the solemn address by Jehovah at the giving of the law (Exodus xix. 4), the same metaphor is employed, and, no doubt, that passage was the source of the extended imagery here. There we read, 'Ye know what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself.' The meaning of the glowing metaphor, with its vivid details, is just that Jehovah brought Israel out of its fixed abode in Goshen, and trained it for mature national life by its varied desert experiences. As one of the prophets puts the same idea, 'I taught Ephraim to go,' where the figure of the parent bird training its callow fledglings for flight is exchanged for that of the nurse teaching a child to walk. While, then, the text primarily refers to the experience of the infant nation in the forty years' wanderings, it carries large truths about us all; and sets forth the true meaning and importance of life. There seem to me to be three thoughts here, which I desire to touch on briefly: first, a great thought about God; then an illuminating thought about the true meaning and aspect of life; and lastly a calming thought about the variety of the methods by which God carries out our training.

I. Here is a great thought about God.

Now, it may come as something of a shock if I say that the bird that is selected for the comparison is not really the eagle, but one which, in our estimation, is of a very much lower order—viz. the carnivorous vulture. But a poetical emblem is not the less fitting, though, besides the points of resemblance, the thing which is so used has others less noble. Our modern repugnance to the vulture as feeding on carcasses was probably not felt by the singer of this song. What he brings into view are the characteristics common to the eagle and the vulture; superb strength in beak and claw, keenness of vision almost incredible, magnificent sweep of pinion and power of rapid, unwearied flight. And these characteristics, we may say, have their analogues in the divine nature, and the emblem not unfitly shadows forth one aspect of the God of Israel, who is 'fearful in praises,' who is strong to destroy as well as to save, whose all-seeing eye marks every foul thing, and who often pounces on it swiftly to rend it to pieces, though the sky seemed empty a moment before.

But the action described in the text is not destructive, terrible, or fierce. The monarch of the sky busies itself with tender cares for its brood. Then, there is gentleness along with the terribleness. The strong beak and claw, the gaze that can see so far, and the mighty spread of wings that can lift it till it is an invisible speck in the blue vault, go along with the instinct of paternity: and the fledglings in the nest look up at the fierce beak and bright eyes, and know no terror. The impression of this blending of power and gentleness is greatly deepened, as it seems to me, if we notice that it is the male bird that is spoken about in the text, which should be rendered: 'As the eagle stirreth up *his* nest and fluttereth over *his* young.'

So we just come to the thought that we must keep the true balance between these two aspects of that great divine nature—the majesty, the terror, the awfulness, the soaring elevation, the all-penetrating vision, the power of the mighty pinion, one stroke of which could crush a universe into nothing; and, on the other side, the yearning instinct of Fatherhood, the love and gentleness, and all the tender ministries for us, His children, to which these lead. Brethren, unless we keep hold of both of these in due equipoise and inseparably intertwining, we damage the one which we retain almost as much as the one which we dismiss. For there is no love like the love that is strong, and can be fierce, and there is no condescension like the condescension of Him who is the Highest, in order that He may be, and because He is ready to be, the lowest. Modern tendencies, legitimately recoiling from the one-sidedness of a past generation, are now turning away far too much from the Old Testament conceptions of Jehovah, which are concentrated in that metaphor of the vulture in the sky. And thereby we destroy the love, in the name of which we scout the wrath.

'Infinite mercy, but, I wis,
As infinite a justice too.'

'As the vulture stirreth up his nest,'—that is the Old Testament revelation of the terribleness and gentleness of Jehovah. 'How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wing?'—that is the New Testament modification of the image. But you never could have had the New unless you first had had the Old. And you are a foolish man if, in the name of the sanctity of the New, you cast away the teaching of the Old. Keep both the metaphors, and they will explain and confirm each other.

II. Here we have an illuminating thought of the meaning of life.

What is it all for? To teach us to fly, to exercise our half-fledged wings in short flights, that may prepare us for, and make it possible to take, longer ones. Every event that befalls us has a meaning beyond itself; and every task that we have to do reacts upon us, the doers, and either fits or hinders us for larger work. Life as a whole, and in its minutest detail, is worthy of God to give, and worthy of us to possess, only if we recognise the teaching that is put into picturesque form in this text—that the meaning of all which God does to us is to train us for something greater yonder. Life as a whole is 'full of sound and fury, signifying nothing,' unless it is an apprenticeship training. What are we here for? To make character. That is the aim and end of all—to make character; to get experience; to learn the use of our tools. I declare it seems to me that the world had better be wiped out altogether, incontinently, unless there is a world beyond, where a man shall use the force which here he made his own. 'Thou hast been faithful in a few things; behold I will make thee ruler over many things.' No man gets to the heart of the mystery of life or has in his hand the key which will enable him to unlock all the doors and difficulties of human experience, unless he gets to this—that it is all meant as training.

If we could only carry that clear conviction with us day by day into the little things of life, what different things these, which we call the monotonous trifles of our daily duties, would become! The things may be small and unimportant, but the way in which we do them is not unimportant. The same fidelity may be exercised, and must be brought to bear, in order to do the veriest trifle of our daily lives rightly, as needs to be invoked, in order to get us safely through the crises and great times of life. There are no great principles for great duties, and little ones for little duties. We have to regulate all our conduct by the same laws. Life is built up of trifles, as mica-flakes, if there be enough of them, make the Alpine summits towering thousands of feet into the blue. Character may be manifested in the great moments, but it is made in the small ones. So, life is meant for discipline, and unless we use it for that, however much enjoyment we get out of it, we misuse it.

III. Lastly, there is here a calming thought as to the variety of God's methods with us.

'As the eagle stirreth up his nest.' No doubt the callow brood are much warmer and more comfortable in the nest than when they are turned out of it. The Israelites were by no means enamoured with the prospect of leaving the flesh-pots and the onions and the farmhouses that they had got for themselves in Goshen, to tramp with their cattle through the wilderness. They went after Moses with considerable disinclination.

Here we have, then, as the first thing needed, God's loving compulsion to effort. To 'stir up the nest' means to make a man uncomfortable where he is;—sometimes by the prickings of his conscience, which are often the voices of God's Spirit; sometimes by changes of circumstances, either for the better or for the worse; and oftentimes by sorrows. The straw is pulled out of the nest, and it is not so comfortable to lie in; or a bit of it develops a sharp point that runs into the half-feathered skin, and makes the fledgling glad to come forth into the air. We all shrink from change. What should we do if we had it not? We should stiffen into habits that would dwarf and weaken us. We all recoil from storms. What should we do if we had them not? Sea and air would stagnate, and become heavy and putrid and pestilential, if it were not for the wild west wind and the hurtling storms. So all our changes, instead of being whimpered over, and all our sorrows, instead of being taken reluctantly, should be recognised as being what they are, loving summonses to effort. Then their pressure would be modified, and their blessing would be secured when their purpose was served.

But the training of the father-eagle is not confined to stirring up the nest. What is to become of the young ones when they get out of it, and have never been accustomed to bear themselves up in the invisible ether about them? So 'he fluttereth over his young.' It is a very beautiful word that is employed here, which 'flutter' scarcely gives us. It is the same word that is used in the first chapter of Genesis, about the Spirit of God '*brooding* on the face of the waters'; and it suggests how near, how all-protecting with expanded wings, the divine Father comes to the child whose restfulness He has disturbed.

And is not that true? Had you ever trouble that you took as from Him, which did not bring that hovering presence nearer you, until you could almost feel the motion of the wing, and be brushed by it as it passed protectingly above your head? Ah, yes! 'Stirring the nest' is meant to be the precursor of closer approach of the Father to us; and if we take our changes and our sorrows as loving summonses from Him to effort, be sure that we shall realise Him as near to us, in a fashion that we never did before.

That is not all. There is sustaining power. 'He spreadeth abroad his wings; he taketh them; beareth them on his wings.' On those broad pinions we are lifted, and by them we are guarded. It matters little whether the belief that the parent bird thus carries the young, when wearied with their short flights, is correct or not. The truth which underlies the representation is what concerns us. The beautiful metaphor is a picturesque way of saying, 'In all their afflictions He was afflicted; and the Angel of His presence saved them.' It is a picturesque way of saying, 'Thou canst do all things through Christ which strengtheneth thee.' And we may be very sure that if we let Him 'stir up our nests' and obey His loving summons to effort, He will come very near to strengthen us for our attempts, and to bear us up when our own weak wings fail. The Psalmist sang that angels' hands should bear up God's servant. That is little compared with this promise of being carried heavenwards on Jehovah's own pinions. A vile piece of Greek mythology tells how Jove once, in the guise of an eagle, bore away a boy between his great wings. It is foul where it stands, but it is blessedly true about Christian experience. If only we lay ourselves on God's wings—and that not in idleness, but having ourselves tried our poor little flight—He will see that no harm comes to us.

During life this training will go on; and after life, what then? Then, in the deepest sense, the old word will be true, 'Ye know how I bore you on eagle's wings and brought you *to Myself*'; and the great promise shall be fulfilled, when the half-fledged young brood are matured and full grown, 'They shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.'

THEIR ROCK AND OUR ROCK

'Their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges.'
DEUT. xxxii. 31.

MOSES is about to leave the people whom he had led so long, and his last words are words of solemn warning. He exhorts them to cleave to God. The words of the text simply mean that the history of the nation had sufficiently proved that God, their God, was 'above all gods.' The Canaanites and all the enemies whom Israel had fought had been beaten, and in their awe of this warrior people acknowledged that their idols had found their lord. The great suit of 'Jehovah *versus* Idols' has long since been decided. Every one acknowledges that Christianity is the only religion possible for twentieth century men. But the words of the text lend themselves to a wider application, and clothe in a picturesque garb the universal truth that the experience of godless men proves the futility of their objects of trust, when compared with that of him whose refuge is in God.

I. God is a Rock to them that trust Him.

We note the singular frequency of that designatior in this song, in which it occurs six times. It is alsc found often in the Psalms. If Moses were the singer, we might see in this often-repeated metaphor a trace of influence of the scenery of the Sinaitic peninsula, which would be doubly striking to eyes accustomed to the alluvial plains of Egypt. What are the aspects of the divine nature set forth by this name?

(1) Firm foundation: the solid eternity of the rock on which we can build.

Petra: faithfulness to promises, unchanging.

(2) Refuge: 'refuge from the storm'; 'my rock and my fortress and my high tower.'

(3) Refreshment: rock from which water gushed out; and (4) Repose: 'shadow of a great rock'; 'shadow from the heat.'

Trace the image through Scripture, from this song till Christ's parable of the man who 'built his house on a rock.'

II. Every man's experience shows him that there is no such refuge anywhere else.

We do not assert that every man consciously comes to that conclusion. All we say is that he would do so if he rightly pondered the facts. The history of every life is a history of disappointment. Take these particulars just stated and ask yourselves: What does experience say as to the possibility of our possessing such blessings apart from God? There is no need for us to exaggerate, for the naked reality is sad enough. If God is not our best Good, we have no solid good. Every other 'rock' crumbles into sand. Else why this restless change, why this disquiet, why the constant repetition, generation after generation, of the old, old wail, 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity'? Why does every heart say Amen to the poet and the dramatist singing of 'the fever and the fret,' the tragic fare of man's life?

Our appeal is not to men in the flush of excitement, but to them in their hours of solitary sane reflection. It is from 'Philip drunk to Philip sober.' We each have material for judging in our own case, and in the cases of some others. The experiment of living with other 'rocks' than God has been tried for millenniums now. What has been the issue? You know what Christianity claims that it can do to make a life stable and safe. Do you know anything else that can? You know what Christian men will calmly say that they have found. Can you say as much? Let us hear some dying testimonies. Hearken to Jacob: 'The God which hath fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil.' Hearken to Moses: 'The Rock, His work is perfect, for all His ways are judgment, a God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is He.' Hearken to Joshua: 'Not one good thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake.' Hearken to David: 'The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. . . . Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.' Hearken to Paul: 'The Lord stood by me and strengthened me, and I was delivered . . . the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and will save me unto His heavenly kingdom.' What man who has chosen to take refuge or build on men and creatures can look backward and forward in such fashion?

III. Every man's own nature tells him that God is his true Rock.

Again I say that here I do not appeal to the surface of our consciousness, nor to men who have sophisticated themselves, nor to people who have sinned themselves, into hardness, but to the voice of the inner man which speaks in the depths of each man's being.

There is the cry of Want: the manifest want of the soul for God.

There is the voice of Reason.

There is the voice of Conscience.

IV. Yet many of us will not take God for our Rock.

Surely it is a most extraordinary thing that men should be 'judges,' being convinced in their deepest consciousness that God is the only Foundation and Refuge, and yet that the conviction should have absolutely no influence on their conduct. The same stark, staring inconsequence is visible in many other departments of life, but in this region it works its most tragic results. The message which many of my hearers need most is—follow out your deepest convictions, and be true to the inward voice which condenses all your experience into the one counsel to take God for the 'strength of your hearts and your portion for ever,' for only in Him will you find what you need for life and strength and riches. If He is 'our Rock,' then we shall have a firm foundation, a safe refuge, inexhaustible refreshment and untroubled rest. Lives founded on aught beside are built on sand and will be full of tremors and unsettlements, and at last the despairing builder and his ruined house will be washed away with the dissolving 'sandbank and shoal of time' on which he built.

GOD AND HIS SAINTS

'He loved the people; all His saints are in Thy hand: and they sat down at Thy feet; every one shall receive of Thy words.'—DEUT. xxxiii. 3.

THE great ode of which these words are a part is called 'the blessing wherewith Moses blessed the children of

Israel before his death.' It is mainly an invocation of blessing from Heaven on the various tribes, but it begins, as the national existence of Israel began, with the revelation of God on Sinai, and it lays that as the foundation of everything. It does not matter, for my purposes, in the smallest degree, who was the author of this great song. Whoever he was, he has, by dint of divine inspiration and of his own sympathy with the inmost spirit of the Old Covenant, anticipated the deepest things of Christian truth; and these are here in the words of our text.

I. The first thing that I would point out is the Divine Love which is the foundation of all.

'He loved the people.' That is the beginning of everything. The word that this singer uses is one that only appears in this place, and if we regard its etymology, there lies in it a very tender and beautiful expression of the warmth of the divine love, for it is probably connected with words in an allied language which mean the *bosom* and a *tender embrace*, and so the picture that we have is of that great divine Lover folding 'the people' to His heart, as a mother might her child, and cherishing them in His bosom.

Still further, the word is in a form in the Hebrew which implies that the act spoken about is neither past, present, nor future only, but continuous and perpetual. Thus it suggests to us the thought of timeless, eternal love, which has no beginning, and therefore has no end, which does not grow, and therefore will never decline nor decay, but which runs on upon one lofty level, with neither ups nor downs, and with no variation of the impulse which sends it forth; always the same, and always holding its objects in the fervent embrace of which the text speaks.

Further, mark the place in this great song where this thought comes in. As I said, it is laid as the beginning of everything. 'We love Him because He first loved us' was the height to which the last of the Apostles attained in the last of his writings. But this old singer, with the mists of antiquity around him, who knew nothing about the Cross, nothing about the historical Christ, who had only that which modern thinkers tell us is a revelation of a wrathful God, somehow or other rose to the height of the evangelical conception of God's love as the foundation of the very existence of a people who are His. Like an orchid growing on a block of dry wood and putting forth a gorgeous bloom, this singer, with so much less to feed his faith than we have, has yet borne this fair flower of deep and devout insight into the secret of things and the heart of God. 'He loved the people'—therefore He formed them for Himself; therefore He brought them out of bondage; therefore He came down in flashing fire on Sinai and made known His will, which to know and do is life. All begins from the tender, timeless love of God.

And if the question is asked, Why does God thus love? the only answer is, Because he is God. 'Not for your sakes, O house of Israel . . . but for Mine own name's sake.' The love of God is self-originated. In it, as in all His acts, He is His own motive, as His name, 'I am that I am,' proclaims. It is inseparable from His being, and flows forth before, and independent of, anything in the creature which could draw it out. Men's love is attracted by their perception or their imagination of something loveable in its objects. It is like a well, where there has to be much work of the pump-handle before the gush comes. God's love is like an artesian well, or a fountain springing up from unknown depths in obedience to its own impulse. All that we can say is, 'Thou art God. It is Thy nature and property to be merciful.'

'God loved the people.' The bed-rock is the spontaneous, unalterable, inexhaustible, ever-active, fervent love of God, like that with which a mother clasps her child to her maternal breast. The fair flower of this great thought was a product of Judaism. Let no man say that the God of Love is unknown to the Old Testament.

II. Notice how, with this for a basis, we have next the guardian care extended to all those that answer love by love.

The singer goes on to say, mixing up his pronouns, in the fashion of Hebrew poetry, somewhat arbitrarily, 'all *His* saints are in *Thy* hand.' Now, what is a 'saint'? A man who answers God's love by his love. The notion of a saint has been marred and mutilated by the Church and the world. It has been taken as a special designation of certain selected individuals, mostly of the ascetic and monastic type, whereas it belongs to every one of God's people. It has been taken by the world to mean sanctimoniousness and not sanctity, and is a term of contempt rather than of admiration on their lips. And even those of us, who have got beyond thinking that it is a title of honour belonging only to the aristocracy of Christ's Kingdom, are too apt to mistake what it really does mean. It may be useful to say a word about the Scriptural use and true meaning of that much-abused term. The root idea of sanctity or holiness is not moral character, goodness of disposition and of action, but it is separation from the world and consecration to God. As surely as a magnet applied to a heap of miscellaneous filings will pick out every little bit of iron there, so surely will that love which He bears to the people, when it is responded to, draw to itself, and therefore draw out of the heap, the men that feel its impulse and its preciousness. And so 'saint' means, secondly, righteous and pure, but it means, first, knit to God, separated from evil, and separated by the power of His received love.

Now, brethren, here is a question for each of us: Do I yield to that timeless, tender clasp of the divine Father and Mother in one? Do I answer it by my love? If I do, then I am a 'saint,' because I belong to Him, and He belongs to me, and in that commerce I have broken with the world. If we are true to ourselves, and true to our Lord, and true to the relation between us, the purity of character, which is popularly supposed to be the meaning of *holiness*, will come. Not without effort, not without set-backs, not without slow advance, but it will come; for he that is consecrated to the Lord is 'separated' from iniquity. Such is the meaning of 'saint.'

'All His saints are in Thy hand.' The first metaphor of our text spoke of God's bosom, to which He drew the people and folded them there. This one speaks of His 'hand.' They lie in it. That means two things. It means absolute security, for will He not close His fingers over His palm to keep the soul that has laid itself there? And 'none shall pluck them out of My Father's hand.' No one but yourself can do that. And you can do it, if you cease to respond to His love, and so cease to be a saint. Then you will fall out of His hand, and how far you will fall God only knows.

Being in God's hand means also submission. Loyola said to his black army, 'Be like a stick in a man's hand.'

That meant utter submission and abnegation of self, the willingness to be put anywhere, and used anyhow, and done anything with. And if I by my reception of, and response to, that timeless love, am a saint belonging to God, then not only shall I be secure, but I must be submissive. 'All His saints are in Thy hand.' Do not try to get out of it; be content to let it guide you as the steersman's hand turns the spokes of the wheel and directs the ship.

Now, there is a last thought here. I have spoken of the foundation of all as being divine love, of the security and guardian care of the saints, and there follows one thought more:—

III. The docile obedience of those that are thus guarded.

As the words stand in our Bible, they are as follow:—'They sat down at Thy feet; every one shall receive of Thy words.' These two clauses make up one picture, and one easily understands what it is. It represents a group of docile scholars, sitting at the Master's feet. He is teaching them, and they listen open-mouthed and open-eared to what he says, and will take his words into their lives, like Mary sitting at Christ's feet, whilst Martha was bustling about His meal. But, beautiful as that picture is, there has been suggested a little variation in the words which gives another one that strikes me as being even more beautiful. There are some difficulties of language with which I need not trouble you. But the general result is this, that perhaps instead of 'sitting down at Thy feet' we should read 'followed at Thy feet.' That suggests the familiar metaphor of a guide and those led by him who, without him, know not their road. As a dog follows his master, as the sheep their shepherd, so, this singer felt, will saints follow the God whom they love. Religion is imitation of God. That was a deep thought for such a stage of revelation, and it in part anticipates Christ's tender words: 'He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice.' They follow at His feet. That is the blessedness and the power of Christian morality, that it is keeping close at Christ's heels, and that instead of its being said to us, 'Go,' He says, 'Come,' and instead of our being bid to hew out for ourselves a path of duty, He says to us, 'He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.' They follow at His feet, as the dog at his master's, as the sheep at their shepherd's.

They 'receive His words.' Yes, if you will keep close to Him, He will turn round and speak to you. If you are near enough to Him to catch His whisper He will not leave you without guidance. That is one side of the thought, that following we receive what He says, whereas the people that are away far behind Him scarcely know what His will is, and never can catch the low whisper which will come to us by providences, by movements in our own spirits, through the exercise of our own faculties of judgment and common-sense, if only we will keep near to Him. 'Be ye not as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding, whose mouths must be held in with bit and with bridle, else they will not come near to thee,' but walk close behind Him, and then the promise will be fulfilled: 'I will guide thee with Mine eye.' A glance tells two people who are in sympathy what each wishes, and Jesus Christ will speak to us, if we keep close at His heels.

They that follow Him will 'receive His words' in another sense. They will take them in, and His words will not be wasted. And they will receive them in yet another sense. They will carry them out and do them, and His words will not be in vain.

So, dear brethren, the peace, the strength, the blessedness, the goodness, of our lives flow from these three stages, which this singer so long ago had found to be the essence of everything, recognition of the timeless tenderness of God, the yielding to and answering that love, so that it separates us for Himself, the calm security and happy submission which follow thereon, the imitation of Him in daily life, and the walking in His steps, which is rewarded and made more perfect by hearing more distinctly the whisper of His loving, commanding voice.

ISRAEL THE BELOVED

'The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by Him; and the Lord shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between His shoulders.'—DEUT. xxxiii. 12.

BENJAMIN was his father's favourite child, and the imagery of this promise is throughout drawn from the relations between such a child and its father. So far as the future history of the tribes is shadowed in these 'blessings' of this great ode, the reference of the text may be to the tribe of Benjamin, as specially distinguished by Saul having been a member of it, and by the Temple having been built on its soil. But we find that each of the promises of the text is repeated elsewhere, with distinct reference to the whole nation. For example, the first one, of safe dwelling, reappears in verse 28 in reference to Israel; the second one, of God's protecting covering, is extended to the nation in many places; and the third, of dwelling between His shoulders, is in substance found again in chap. i. 31, 'the Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son.' So that we may give the text a wider extension, and take it as setting forth under a lovely metaphor, and with a restricted reference, what is true of all God's children everywhere and always.

I. Who are the 'beloved of the Lord'?

The first answer to that question must be—all men. But these great blessings, so beautifully shadowed in this text, do not belong to all men; nor does the designation, 'the beloved of the Lord,' belong to all men, but to those who have entered into a special relation to Him. In these words of the Hebrew singer there sound the first faint tones of a music that was to swell into clear notes, when Jesus said: 'If a man love Me, he will keep My Word, and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him.' They who are knit by faith and love to God's only-begotten and beloved Son, by that union receive 'power to become the sons of God,' and share in the love which is ever pouring out from the Father's heart on 'the Son of His love.'

II. What are their blessed privileges?

The three clauses of the text express substantially the same idea, but with a striking variety of metaphors.

1. They have a sure dwelling-place.

There is a very slight change of rendering of the first clause, which greatly increases its force, and preserves the figure that is obscured by the usual translation. We should read 'shall dwell safely *on*,' rather than '*by*, Him.' And the effect of that small change in the preposition is to bring out the thought that God is regarded as the foundation on which His beloved build their house of life, and dwell in security and calm. If we are sons through the Son, we shall build our houses or pitch our tents on that firm ground, and, being founded on the Rock of ages, they will not fall when all created foundations reel to the overthrow of whatever is built on *them*. It is not companionship only, blessed as that is, that is promised here. We have a larger privilege than dwelling *by* Him, for if we love His Son, we build *on* God, and 'God dwelleth in us and we in Him.'

What spiritual reality underlies the metaphor of dwelling or building on God? The fact of habitual communion.

Note the blessed results of such grounding of our lives on God through such habitual communion. We shall 'dwell safely.' We may think of that as being objective safety—that is, freedom from peril, or as being subjective—that is, freedom from care or fear, or as meaning 'trustfully,' confidently, as the expression is rendered in Psalm xvi. 9 (margin), which is for us the ground of both these. He who dwells in God trustfully dwells both safely and securely, and none else is free either from danger or from dread.

2. They have a sure shelter.

God is for His beloved not only the foundation on which they dwell in safety, but their perpetual covering. They dwell safely because He is so. There are many tender shapes in which this great promise is presented to our faith. Sometimes God is thought of as covering the weak fugitive, as the arching sides of His cave sheltered David from Saul. Sometimes He is represented as covering His beloved, who cower under His wings, 'as the hen gathereth her chickens' when hawks are in the sky. Sometimes He appears as covering them from tempest, 'when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall,' and 'the shadow of a great rock' shields from its fury. Sometimes He is pictured as stretching out protection over His beloved's heads, as the Pillar of cloud lay, long-drawn-out, over the Tabernacle when at rest, and 'on all the Glory was a defence.' But under whatever emblem the general idea of a covering shelter was conceived, there was always a correlative duty on our side. For the root-meaning of one of the Old Testament words for 'faith' is 'fleeing to a refuge,' and we shall not be safe in God unless by faith we flee for refuge to Him in Christ.

3. They have a Father who bears them on His shoulders.

The image is the same as in chap. i. already referred to. It recurs also in Isaiah (xlvi. 3, 4), 'Even to hoar hairs will I carry you, and I have made and I will bear, yea, I will carry, and will deliver'; and in Hosea (xi. 3), 'I taught Ephraim to go; I took them on My arms.'

The image beautifully suggests the thought of the favourite child riding high and happy on the strong shoulder, which lifts it above rough places and miry ways. The prose reality is: 'My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.'

The Cross carries those who carry it. They who carry God in their hearts are carried by God through all the long pilgrimage of life. Because they are thus upheld by a strength not their own, 'they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint,' and though marches be long and limbs strained, they shall 'go from strength to strength till every one of them appears before God in Zion.'

'AT THE BUSH'

'. . The goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush.'—DEUT. xxxiii. 16.

I THINK this is the only reference in the Old Testament to that great vision which underlay Moses' call and Israel's deliverance. It occurs in what is called 'the blessing wherewith Moses, the man of God, blessed the children of Israel before his death,' although modern opinion tends to decide that this hymn is indeed much more recent than the days of Moses. There seems a peculiar appropriateness in this reference being put into the mouth of the ancient Lawgiver, for to him even Sinai, with all its glories, cannot have been so impressive and so formative of his character as was the vision granted to him when solitary in the wilderness. It is to be noticed that the characteristic by which God is designated here never occurs elsewhere than in this one place. It is intended to intensify the conception of the greatness, and preciousness, and all-sufficiency of that 'goodwill.' If it is that 'of Him that dwelt in the bush,' it is sure to be all that a man can need. I need not remind you that the words occur in the blessing pronounced on 'Joseph'—that is, the two tribes which represented Joseph—in which all the greatest material gifts that could be desired by a pastoral people are first called down upon them, and then the ground of all these is laid in 'the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush.' 'The blessing—let it come on the head of Joseph.'

So then here, first, is a great thought as to what for us all is the blessing of blessings—God's 'goodwill.' 'Goodwill'—the word, perhaps, might bear a little stronger rendering. 'Goodwill' is somewhat tepid. A man may have a good enough will, and yet no very strong emotion of favour or delight, and may do nothing to carry his goodwill into action. But the word that is employed here, and is a common enough one in Scripture, always carries with it a certain intensity and warmth of feeling. It is more than 'goodwill'; it is more than 'favour'; perhaps 'delight' would be nearer the meaning. It implies, too, not only the inward sentiment of complacency, but also the active purpose of action in conformity with it, on God's part. Now it needs few words to show that these two things, which are inseparable, do make the blessing of blessings for every one of us—the delight, the complacency, of God in us, and the active purpose of good in God for us. These are the things that will make a man happy wherever he is.

If I might dwell for a moment upon other scriptural passages, I would just recall to you, as bringing up very strongly and beautifully the all-sufficiency and the blessed effects of having this delight and loving purpose directed towards us like a sunbeam, the various great things that a chorus of psalmists say that it will do for a man. Here is one of their triumphant utterances: 'Thou wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt Thou compass him as with a shield.' That crystal battlement, if I may so vary the figure, is round a man, keeping far away from him all manner of real evil, and filling his quiet heart as he stands erect behind the rampart, with the sense of absolute security. That is one of the blessings that God's favour or goodwill will secure for us. Again, we read: 'By Thy favour Thou hast made my mountain to stand strong.' He that knows himself to be the object of the divine delight, and who by faith knows himself to be the object of the divine activity in protection, stands firm, and his purposes will be carried through, because they will be purposes in accordance with the divine mind, and nothing has power to shake him. So he that grasps the hand of God can say, not because of his grasp, but because of the Hand that he holds, 'The Lord is at my right hand; I shall not be greatly moved. By Thy favour Thou hast made our mountain to stand strong.' And again, in another analogous but yet diversified representation, we read: 'In Thee shall we rejoice all the day, and in Thy favour shall our horn be exalted.' That is the emblem, not only of victory, but of joyful confidence, and so he who knows himself to have God for his friend and his helper, can go through the world keeping a sunny face, whatever the clouds may be, erect and secure, light of heart and buoyant, holding up his chin above the stormiest waters, and breasting all difficulties and dangers with a confidence far away from presumption, because it is the consequence of the realisation of God's presence. So the goodwill of God is the chiefest good.

Now, if we turn to the remarkable designation of the divine nature which is here, consider what rivers of strength and of blessedness flow out of the thought that for each of us 'the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush' may be our possession.

What does that pregnant designation of God say? That was a strange shrine for God, that poor, ragged, dry desert bush, with apparently no sap in its gray stem, prickly with thorns, with 'no beauty that we should desire it,' fragile and insignificant, yet it was 'God's house.' Not in the cedars of Lebanon, not in the great monarchs of the forest, but in the forlorn child of the desert did He abide. 'The goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush' may dwell in you and me. Never mind how small, never mind how sapless, never mind how lightly esteemed among men, never mind though we make a very poor show by the side of the 'oaks of Bashan' or the 'cedars of Lebanon.' It is all right; the Fire does not dwell in them. 'Unto this man will I look, and with him will I dwell, who is of a humble and a contrite heart, and who trembleth at My word.' Let no sense of poverty, weakness, unworthiness, ever draw the faintest film of fear across our confidence, for even with us He will sojourn. For it is 'the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush' that we evoke for ours.

Again, what more does that name say? He 'that dwelt in the bush' filled it with fire, and it 'burned and was not consumed.' Now there is good ground to object to the ordinary interpretation, as if the burning of the bush which yet remains unconsumed was meant to symbolise Israel, or, in the New Testament application, the Church which, notwithstanding all persecution, still remains undestroyed. Our brethren of the Presbyterian churches have taken the Latin form of the words in the context for their motto—*Nec Tamen Consumebatur*. But I venture to think that that is a mistake; and that what is meant by the symbol is just what is expressed by the verbal revelation which accompanied it, and that was this: 'I AM THAT I AM.' The fire that did not burn out is the emblem of the divine nature which does not tend to death because it lives, nor to exhaustion because it energises, nor to emptiness because it bestows, but after all times is the same; lives by its own energy and is independent. 'I am that I have become,'—that is what men have to say. 'I am that I once was not, and again once shall not be,' is what men have to say. 'I am that I am' is God's name. And this eternal, ever-living, self-sufficing, absolute, independent, unwearied, inexhaustible God is the God whose favour is as inexhaustible as Himself, and eternal as His own being. 'Therefore the sons of men shall put their trust beneath the shadow of Thy wings,' and, if they have 'the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush,' will be able to say, 'Because Thou livest we shall live also.'

What more does the name say? He 'that dwelt in the bush' dwelt there in order to deliver; and, dwelling there, declared 'I have seen the affliction of My people, and am come down to deliver them.' So, then, if the goodwill of that eternal, delivering God is with us, we, too, may feel that our trivial troubles and our heavy burdens, all the needs of our prisoned wills and captive souls, are known to Him, and that we shall have deliverance from them by Him. Brethren, in that name, with its historical associations, with its deep revelations of the divine nature, with its large promises of the divine sympathy and help, there lie surely abundant strengths and consolations for us all. The goodwill, the delight, of God, and the active help of God, may be ours, and if these be ours we shall be blessed and strong.

Do not let us forget the place in this blessing on the head of Joseph which my text holds. It is preceded by an invoking of the precious things of Heaven, and 'the precious fruits brought forth by the sun . . . of the chief things of the ancient mountains, and the precious things of the lasting hills, and the precious things of the earth and the fulness thereof.' They are all heaped together in one great mass for the beloved Joseph. And then, like the golden spire that tops some of those campaniles in Italian cities, and completes their beauty, above them all there is set, as the shining apex of all, 'the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush.' That is more precious than all other precious things; set last because it is to be sought first; set last as in building some great structure the top stone is put on last of all; set last because it gathers all others into itself, secures that all others shall be ours in the measure in which we need them, and arms us against all possibilities of evil. So the blessing of blessings is the 'goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush.'

In my text this is an invocation only; but we can go further than that. You and I can make sure that we have it, if we will. How to secure it? One of the texts which I have already quoted helps us a little way along the road in answer to that question, for it says, 'Thou, Lord, wilt bless the righteous. With favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield.' But it is of little use to tell me that if I am 'righteous' God will 'bless me,' and 'compass me with favour.' If you will tell me how to become righteous, you will do me more good. And we have been told how to be righteous—'If a man keep My commandments My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him.' If we knit ourselves to Jesus Christ, and we can all do that if we like, by faith that trusts Him, and by love, the child of faith, that obeys Him, and grows daily more like Him—then, without a doubt, that delight of God in us, and that active purpose of good in God's mind towards us, will assuredly be ours; and on no other terms.

So, dear brethren, the upshot of my homily is just this—Men may strive and scheme, and wear their finger-nails down to the quick, to get some lesser good, and fail after all. The greatest good is certainly ours by that easy road which, however hard it may be otherwise, is made easy because it is so certain to bring us to what we want. Holiness is the condition of God's delight in us, and a genuine faith in Christ, and the love which faith evokes, are the conditions. So it is a very simple matter You never can be sure of getting the lower good You can be quite sure of getting the highest. You never can be certain that the precious things of the earth and the fulness thereof will be yours, or that if they were, they would be so very precious; but you can be quite sure that the 'goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush' may lie like light upon your hearts, and be strength to your limbs.

And so I commend to you the words of the Apostle, 'Wherefore we labour that, whether present or absent, we may be well-pleasing to Him.' To minister to God's delight is the highest glory of man. To have the favour of Him that dwelt in the bush resting upon us is the highest blessing for man. He will say 'Well done! good and faithful servant.' 'The Lord taketh pleasure' —wonderful as it sounds—'in them that fear Him, in them that hope in His mercy,' and that, hoping in His mercy, live as He would have them live.

SHOD FOR THE ROAD

'Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.'
DEUT. xxxiii. 25.

THERE is a general correspondence between those blessings wherewith Moses blessed the tribes of Israel before his death, and the circumstances and territory of each tribe in the promised land. The portion of Asher, in whose blessing the words of our text occurs, was partly the rocky northern coast and partly the fertile lands stretching to the base of the Lebanon. In the inland part of their territory they cultivated large olive groves, the produce of which was trodden out in great rock-hewn cisterns. So the clause before my text is a benediction upon that industry—'let him dip his foot in oil.' And then the metaphor naturally suggested by the mention of the foot is carried on into the next words, 'Thy shoes shall be iron and brass,' the tribe being located upon rocky sea-coast, having rough roads to travel, and so needing to be well shod. The substance, then, of that promise seems to be—strength adequate to, and unworn by, exercise; while the second clause, though not altogether plain, seems to put a somewhat similar idea in unmetaphorical shape. 'As thy days, so shall thy strength be,' probably means the promise of power that grows with growing years.

So, then, we have first that thought that God gives us an equipment of strength proportioned to our work,—shoes fit for our road. God does not turn people out to scramble over rough mountains with thin-soled boots on; that is the plain English of the words. When an Alpine climber is preparing to go away into Switzerland for rock work, the first thing he does is to get a pair of strong shoes, with plenty of iron nails in the soles of them. So Asher had to be shod for his rough roads, and so each of us may be sure that if God sends us on stony paths He will provide us with strong shoes, and will not send us out on any journey for which He does not equip us well.

There are no difficulties to be found in any path of duty, for which he that is called to tread it is not prepared by Him that sent him. Whatsoever may be the road, our equipment is calculated for it, and is given to us from Him that has appointed it.

Is there not a suggestion here, too, as to the sort of travelling we may expect to have? An old saying tells us that we do not go to heaven in silver slippers, and the reason is because the road is rough. The 'primrose way' leads somewhere else, and *it* may be walked on 'delicately.' But if we need shoes of iron and brass, we may pretty well guess the kind of road we have before us. If a man is equipped with such coverings on his feet, depend upon it that there will be use for them before he gets to the end of his day's journey. The thickest sole will make the easiest travelling over rocky roads. So be quite sure of this, that if God gives to us certain endowments and equipments which are only calculated for very toilsome paths, the roughness of the road will match the stoutness of the shoes.

And see what He does give. See the provision which is made for patience and strength, for endurance and courage, in all the messages of His mercy, in all the words of His love, in all the powers of His Gospel, and then say whether that looks as if we should have an easy life of it on our way home. Those two ships that went away a while ago upon the brave, and, as some people thought, desperate task of finding the North Pole—any one that looked upon them as they lay in Portsmouth Roads, might know that it was no holiday cruise they were meant for. The thickness of the sides, the strength of the cordage, the massiveness of the equipment, did not look like pleasure-sailing.

And so, dear brethren, if we think of all that is given to us in God's Gospel in the way of stimulus and encouragement, and exhortation, and actual communication of powers, we may calculate, from the abundance of the resources, how great will be the strain upon us before we come to the end, and our 'feet stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem.' Go into some of the great fortresses in continental countries, and you will find the store-rooms full of ammunition and provisions; bread enough and biscuits enough, as it seems, for half the country, laid up there, and a deep well somewhere or other in the courtyard. What does that mean? It means fighting, that is what it means. So if we are brought into this strong pavilion, so well provisioned, so massively fortified and defended, that means that we shall need all the strength that is to be found in those thick walls, and all the sustenance that is to be found in those gorged magazines, and all the refreshment that is to be drawn from that free, and full, and inexhaustible fountain, before the battle is over and the victory won. Depend upon it, the promise 'Thy shoes shall be iron and brass,' means, 'Thy road shall be rocky and flinty'; and so it is.

And yet, thank God! whilst it is true that it is very hard and very difficult for many of us, and hard and difficult—even if without the 'very'—for us all, it is also true that we have the adequate provision sufficient for all our necessities—and far more than sufficient! It is a poor compliment to the strength that He gives to us to say that it is enough to carry us through. God does not deal out His gifts to people with such an economical correspondence to necessities as that. There is always a wide margin. More than we can ask, more than we can think, more than we can need is given us.

If He were to deal with us as men often deal with one another, asking us, 'Well, how much do you want? cannot you do with a little less? there is the exact quantity that you need for your support'—if you got your bread by weight and your water by measure, it would be a very poor affair. See how He actually does—He says, 'Child, there is Mine own strength for you'; and we think that we honour Him when we say, 'God has given us enough for our necessities!' Rather the old word is always true: 'So they did eat and were filled; and they took up of the fragments that remained seven baskets-full,' and after they were satisfied and replete with the provision, there was more at the end than when they began.

That suggests another possible thought to be drawn from this promise, namely, that it assures not only of strength adequate to the difficulties and perils of the journey, but also of a strength which is not worn out by use.

The 'portion' of Asher was the rocky sea-coast. The sharp, jagged rocks would cut to pieces anything made of leather long before the day's march was over; but the travellers have their feet shod with metal, and the rocks which they have to stumble over will only strike fire from their shoes. They need not step timidly for fear of wearing them out; but, wherever they have to march, may go with full confidence that their shoeing will not fail them. A wise general looks after that part of his soldiers' outfit with special care, knowing that if *it* gives out, all the rest is of no use. So our Captain provides us with an inexhaustible strength, to which we may fully trust. We shall not exhaust it by any demands that we can make upon it. We shall only brighten it up, like the nails in a well-used shoe, the heads of which are polished by stumbling and scrambling over rocky roads.

So we may be bold in the march, and draw upon our stock of strength to the utmost. There is no fear that it will fail us. We may put all our force into our work; we shall not weaken the power which 'by reason of use is exercised,' not exhausted. For the grace which Christ gives us to serve Him, being divine, is subject to no weariness, and neither faints nor fails. The bush that burned unconsumed is a type of that Infinite Being who works unexhausted, and lives undying, after all expenditure is rich, after all pouring forth is full. And of His strength we partake.

Whensoever a man puts forth an effort of any kind whatever—when I speak, when I lift my hand, when I run, when I think—there is waste of muscular tissue. Some of my strength goes in the act, and thus every effort means expenditure and diminution of force. Hence weariness that needs sleep, waste that needs food, languor that needs rest. We belong to an order of being in which work is death, in regard to our physical nature; but our spirits may lay hold of God, and enter into an order of things in which work is not death, nor effort exhaustion, nor is there loss of power in the expenditure of power.

That sounds strange, and yet it is not strange. Think of that electric light which is made by directing a strong stream upon two small pieces of carbon. As the electricity strikes upon these and turns their blackness into a fiery blaze, it eats away their substance while it changes them into light. But there is an arrangement in the lamp by which a fresh surface is continually being brought into the path of the beam, and so the light continues without wavering and blazes on. The carbon is our human nature, black and dull in itself; the electric beam is the swift energy of God, which makes us 'light in the Lord.' For the one, decay is the end of effort; for the other, there is none. 'Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.' Though we belong to the perishing order of nature by our bodily frame, we belong to the undecaying realm of grace by the spirit that lays hold upon God. And if our work weary us, as it must do so long as we continue here, yet in the deepest sanctuary of our being, our strength is greatened by exercise. 'Thy shoes shall be iron and brass.' 'Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years.' 'Stand, therefore, having your feet shod with the preparedness of the Gospel of peace.'

But this is not all. There is an advance even upon these great promises in the closing words. That second clause of our text says more than the first one. 'Thy shoes shall be iron and brass,' that promises us powers and provision adapted to, and unexhausted by, the weary pilgrimage and rough road of life. But 'as thy days, so shall thy strength be,' says even more than that. The meaning of the word rendered 'strength' in our version is very doubtful, and most modern translators are inclined to render it 'rest.' But if we adhere to the translation of our version, we get a forcible and relevant promise, which fits on well to the previous clause, understood as it has been in my previous remarks. The usual understanding of the words is 'strength proportioned to thy day,' an idea which we have found already suggested by the previous clause. But that explanation rests on, or at any rate derives support from, the common misquotation of the words. They are not, as we generally hear them quoted, 'As thy day, so shall thy strength be,'—but 'day' is in the plural, and that makes a great difference. 'As thy days, so shall thy strength be,' that is to say: the two sums—of 'thy days' and of 'thy strength'—keep growing side by side, the one as fast as the other and no faster. The days increase. Well, what then? The strength increases too. As I said, we are allied to two worlds. According to the law of one of them, the outer world of physical life, we soon reach the summit of human strength. For a little while it is true, even in the life of nature, that our power grows with our days. But we soon reach the watershed, and then the opposite comes to be true. Down, steadily down, we go. With diminishing power, with diminishing vitality, with a dimmer eye, with an obtuser ear, with a slower-beating heart, with a feebler frame, we march on and on to our grave. 'As thy days, so shall thy weakness be,' is the law for all of us mature men and women in regard to our outward life.

But, dear brethren, we may be emancipated from that dreary law in regard to the true life of our spirits, and instead of growing weaker as we grow older, we may and we should grow stronger. We may be and we should be moving on a course that has no limit to its advance. We may be travelling on a shining path through the heavens, that has no noon-tide height from which it must slowly and sadly decline, but tends steadily and for ever upwards, nearer and nearer to the very fountain itself of heavenly radiance. 'The path of the just is as the shining light, which shineth more and more till the noon-tide of the day.' But the reality surpasses even that grand thought, for it discloses to us an endless approximation to an infinite beauty, and an ever-growing possession of never exhausted fulness, as the law for the progress of all Christ's servants. The life of each of us may and should be continual accession and increase of power through all the days here, through all the ages beyond. Why? Because 'the life which I live, I live by the faith of the Son of God.' Christ liveth in me. It is not my strength that grows, so much as God's strength in me which is given more abundantly as the days roll. It is so given on one condition. If my faith has laid hold of the infinite, the exhaustless, the immortal energy of God, unless there is something fearfully wrong about me, I shall be becoming purer, nobler, wiser, more observant of His will, gentler, liker Christ, every way fitter for His service, and for larger service, as the days increase.

Those of us who have reached middle life, or perhaps gone a little over the watershed, ought to have this experience as our own in a very distinct degree. The years that are past ought to have drawn us somewhat away from our hot pursuing after earthly and perishable things. They should have added something to the clearness and completeness of our perception of the deep simplicity of God's gospel. They should have tightened our hold and increased our possession of Christ, and unfolded more and more of His all-sufficiency. They should have enriched us with memories of God's loving care, and lighted all the sky behind with a glow which is reflected on the path before us, and kindles calm confidence in His unfailing goodness. They should have given us power and skill for the conflicts that yet remain, as the Red Indians believe that the strength of every defeated and scalped enemy passes into his conqueror's arm. They should have given force to our better nature, and weakening, progressive weakening, to our worse. They should have rooted us more firmly and abidingly in Him from whom all our power comes, and so have given us more and fuller supplies of His exhaustless and ever-flowing might.

So it may be with us if we abide in Him, without whom we are nothing, but partaking of whose strength 'the weakest shall be as David, and David as an angel of God.'

If for us, drawing nearer to the end is drawing nearer to the light, our faces will be brightened more and more with that light which we approach, and our path will be 'as the shining light which shines more and more unto the noon-tide of the day,' because we are closer to the very fountain of heavenly radiance, and growingly bathed and flooded with the outgoings of His glory. 'As thy days, so shall thy strength be.'

The promise ought to be true for us all. It *is* true for all who use the things that are freely given to them of God. And whilst thus it is the law for the devout life here, its most glorious fulfilment remains for the life beyond. There each new moment shall bring new strength, and growing millenniums but add fresh vigour to our immortal life. Here the unresting beat of the waves of the sea of time gnaws away the bank and shoal whereon we stand, but there each roll of the great ocean of eternity shall but spread new treasures at our feet and add new acres to our immortal heritage. 'The oldest angels,' says Swedenborg, 'look the youngest.' When life is immortal, the longer it lasts the stronger it becomes, and so the spirits that have stood for countless days before His throne, when they appear to human eyes, appear as —'young men clothed in long white garments,'—full of unaging youth and energy that cannot wane. So, whilst in the flesh we must obey the law of decay, the spirit may be subject to this better law of life, and 'while the outward man perisheth, the inward man be renewed day by day.' 'Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but they that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.'

A DEATH IN THE DESERT

'So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. 6. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, . . . but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.'—DEUT. xxxiv. 5, 6.

A FITTING end to such a life! The great law-giver and leader had been all his days a lonely man; and now, surrounded by a new generation, and all the old familiar faces vanished, he is more solitary than ever. He had lived alone with God, and it was fitting that alone with God he should die.

How the silent congregation must have watched, as, alone, with 'natural strength unabated,' he breasted the mountain, and went up to be seen no more! With dignified reticence our chapter tells us no details. He 'died there,' in that dreary solitude, and in some cleft he was buried, and no man knows where. The lessons of that solitary death and unknown tomb may best be learned by contrast with another death and another grave—those of the Leader of the New Covenant, the Law-giver and Deliverer from a worse bondage, and Guide into a better Canaan, the Son who was faithful over His own house, as Moses was 'faithful in all his house, as a servant.' That lonely and forgotten grave among the savage cliffs was in keeping with the whole character and work of him who lay there.

'Here,—here 's his place, where meteors shoot, clouds form,
Lightnings are loosened,
Stars come and go! Let joy break with the storm,
Peace let the dew send!
Lofty designs must close in like effects;
Loftily lying,
Leave him—still loftier than the world suspects,
Living and dying.'

Contrast that grave with the sepulchre in the garden where Jesus lay, close by a city wall, guarded by foes, haunted by troops of weeping friends, visited by a great light of angel faces. The one was hidden and solitary, as teaching the loneliness and mystery of death; the other revealed light in the darkness, and companionship in the loneliness The one faded from men's memory because it was nothing to any man; no impulses, nor hopes, nor gifts, could come from it. The other forever draws hearts and memories, because in it was wrought out the victory in which all our hopes are rooted. An endured cross an empty grave, an occupied throne, are as the threefold cord on which all our hopes hang. Moses was solitary as God's servant in life and death, and oblivion covered his mountain grave. Christ's 'delights were with the sons of men.' He lived among them, and all men 'know his sepulchre to this day.'

I. Note, then, first, as a lesson gathered from this lonely death, the penalty of transgression.

One of the great truths which the old law and ordinances given by Moses were intended to burn in on the conscience of the Jew, and through him on the conscience of the world, was that indissoluble connection between evil done and evil suffered, which reaches its highest exemplification in the death which is the 'wages of sin.' And just as some men that have invented instruments for capital punishment have themselves had to prove the sharpness of their own axe, so the lawgiver, whose message it had been to declare, 'the soul that sinneth it shall die,' had himself to go up alone to the mountain-top to receive in his own person the exemplification of the law that had been spoken by his own lips. He sinned when, in a moment of passion (with many palliations and excuses), he smote the rock that he was bidden to address, and forgot therein, and in his angry words to the rebels, that he was only an instrument in the divine hand. It was a momentary wavering in a hundred and twenty years of obedience. It was one failure in a life of self-abnegation and suppression. The stern sentence came.

People say, 'A heavy penalty for a small offence.' Yes; but an offence of Moses could not be a small offence.' *Noblesse oblige!* The higher a man rises in communion with God, and the more glorious the message and office which are put into his hands, the more intolerable in him is the slightest deflection from the loftiest level. A splash of mud, that would never be seen on a navvy's clothes, stains the white satin of a bride or the embroidered garment of a noble. And so a little sin done by a loftily endowed and inspired man ceases to be small.

Nor are we to regard that momentary lapse only from the outside and the surface. One little mark under the armpit of a plague-sufferer tells the physician that the fatal disease is there. A tiny leaf above ground may tell that, deep below, lurks the root of a poison plant. That little deflection, coming as it did at the beginning of the resumption of his functions by the Lawgiver after seven-and-thirty years of comparative abeyance, and on his first encounter with the new generation that he had to lead, was a very significant indication that his character had begun to yield and suffer from the strain that had been put upon it; and that, in fact, he was scarcely fit for the responsibilities that the new circumstances brought. So the penalty was not so disproportionate to the fault as it may seem.

And was the penalty such a very great one? Do you think that a man who had been toiling for eighty years at a very thankless task would consider it a very severe punishment to be told, 'Go home and take your wages'? It did not mean the withdrawal of the divine favour. 'Moses and Aaron among his priests. . . . Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though Thou tookest vengeance of their inventions.' The penalty of a forgiven sin is never hard to bear, and the penalty of a forgiven sin is very often punctually and mercifully exacted.

But still we are not to ignore the fact that this lonely death, with which we are now concerned, is of the nature of a penal infliction. And so it stands forth in consonance with the whole tone of the Mosaic teaching. I admit, of course, that the mere physical fact of the separation between body and spirit is simply the result of natural law. But that is not the death that you and I know. Death as we know it, the ugly thing that flings its long shadows across all life, and that comes armed with terrors for conscience and spirit, is 'the wages of sin,' and is only experienced by men who have transgressed the law of God. So far Moses in his life and in his death carries us—that no transgression escapes the appropriate punishment; that the smallest sin has in it the seeds of mortal consequences; that the loftiest saint does not escape the law of retribution.

And no further does Moses with his Law and his death carry us. But we turn to the other death. And there we find the confirmation, in an eminent degree, of that Law, and yet the repeal of it. It is confirmed and exhausted in Jesus Christ. His death was 'the wages of sin.' Whose? Not His. Mine, yours, every man's. And because He died, surrounded by men, outside the old city wall, pure and sinless in Himself, He therein both said 'Amen' to the Law of Moses, and swept it away. For all the sins of the world were laid upon His head, He bore the curse for us all, and has emptied the bitter cup which men's transgressions have mingled. Therefore the solitary death in the desert proclaims 'the wages of sin'; that death outside the city wall proclaims 'the gift of God,' which is 'eternal life.'

II. Another of the lessons of our incident is the withdrawal, by a hard fate, of the worker on the very eve of the completion of his work.

For all these forty years there had gleamed before the fixed and steadfast spirit of the sorely tried leader one hope that he never abandoned, and that was that he might look upon and enter into the blessed land which God had promised. And now he stands on the heights of Moab. Half a dozen miles onwards, as the crow flies, and his feet would tread its soil. He lifts his eyes, and away up yonder, in the far north, he sees the rolling uplands of Gilead, and across the deep gash where the Jordan runs, he catches a glimpse of the blue hills of Naphtali or of Galilee, and the central mountain masses of Ephraim and Manasseh, where Ebal and Gerizim lift their heads; and then, further south, the stony summits of the Judæan hills, where Jerusalem and Bethlehem lie, and, through some gap in the mountains, a gleam as of sunshine upon armour tells where the ocean is. And then his eye falls upon the waterless plateau of the South, and at his feet the fertile valley of Jordan, with Jericho glittering amongst its palm trees like a diamond set in emeralds, and on some spur of the lower hill bounding the plain, the little Zoar. This was the land which the Lord had promised to the fathers, for which he had been yearning, and to which all his work had been directed all these years; and now he is to die, as my text puts it, with such pathetic emphasis, 'there in Moab,' and to have no part in the fair inheritance.

It is the lot of all epoch-making men, of all great constructive and reforming geniuses, whether in the Church or in the world, that they should toil at a task, the full issues of which will not be known until their heads are laid low in the dust. But if, on the one hand, that seems hard, on the other hand there is the compensation of 'the vision of the future and all the wonder that shall be,' which is granted many a time to the faithful worker ere he closes his eyes. But that is not the fate of epoch-making and great men only; it is the law for our little lives. If these are worth anything, they are constructed on a scale too large to bring out all their results here and now. It is easy for a man to secure immediate consequences of an earthly kind; easy enough for him to make certain that he shall have the fruit of his toil. But quick returns mean small profits; and an unfinished life that succeeds in nothing may be far better than a completed one, that has realised all its shabby purposes and accomplished all its petty desires. Do you, my brother, live for the far-off; and seek not for the immediate issues and fruits that the world can give, but be contented to be of those whose toil waits for eternity to disclose its significance. Better a half-finished temple than a finished pigstye or huckster's shop. Better a life, the beginning of much and the completion of nothing, than a life directed to and hitting an earthly aim. 'He that soweth to the spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting,' and his harvest and garner are beyond the grave.

III. Again, notice here the lesson of the solitude and mystery of death.

Moses dies alone, with no hand to clasp his, none to close his eyes; but God's finger does it. The outward form of his death is but putting into symbol and visibility the awful characteristics of that last moment for us all. However closely we have been twined with others, each of us has to unclasp dear hands, and make that journey through the narrow, dark tunnel by himself. We live alone in a very real sense, but we each have to die as if there were not another human being in the whole universe but only ourselves. But the solitude may be a solitude with God. Up there, alone with the stars and the sky and the everlasting rocks and menacing death, Moses had for companion the supporting God. That awful path is not too desolate and lonely to be trodden if we tread it with Him.

Moses' lonely death leads to a society yonder. If you refer to the thirty-second chapter you will find that, when he was summoned to the mountain, God said to him, 'Die in the mount whither thou goest up, and be gathered to thy people.' He was to be buried there, up amongst the rocks of Moab, and no man was ever to visit his sepulchre to drop a tear over it. How, then, was he 'gathered to his people'? Surely only thus, that, dying in the desert alone, he opened his eyes in 'the City,' surrounded by 'solemn troops and sweet societies' of those to whom he was kindred. So the solitude of a moment leads on to blessed and eternal companionship.

So far the death of Moses carries us. What does the other death say? Moses had none but God with him when he died. There is a drearier desolation than that, and Jesus Christ proved it when He cried, 'My

God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' That was solitude indeed, and in that hour of mysterious, and to us unfathomable, desertion and misery, the lonely Christ sounded a depth, of which the lawgiver in His death but skimmed the surface. Christ was parted from God in His death, because He bore on Him the sins that separate us from our Father, and in order that none of us may ever need to tread that dark passage alone, but may be able to say, 'I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me'—Thou, who hast trodden every step in its rough and dreary path, uncheered by the presence which cheers us and millions more. Christ died that we might live. He died alone that, when we come to die, we may hold His hand and the solitude may vanish.

Then, again, our incident teaches us the mystery that wrapped death to that ancient world, of which we may regard that unknown and forgotten sepulchre as the visible symbol. Deep darkness lies over the Old Testament in reference to what is beyond the grave, broken by gleams of light, when the religious consciousness asserted its indestructibility, in spite of all appearance to the contrary; but never growing to the brightness of serene and continuous assurance of immortal life and resurrection. We may conceive that mysteriousness as set forth for us by that grave that was hidden away in the defiles of Moab, unvisited and uncared for by any.

We turn to the other grave, and there, as the stone is rolled away, and the rising sunshine of the Easter morning pours into it, we have a visible symbol of the life and immortality which Jesus Christ then brought to light by His Gospel. The buried grave speaks of the inscrutable mystery that wrapped the future: the open sepulchre proclaims the risen Lord of life, and the sunlight certainty of future blessedness which we owe to Him. Death is solitary no more, though it be lonely as far as human companionship is concerned; and a mystery no more, though what is beyond is hidden from our view, and none but Christ has ever returned to tell the tale, and He has told us little but the fact that we shall live with Him.

We rejoice that we have not to turn to a grave hid amongst the hills where our dead Leader lies, but to an open sepulchre by the city wall in the sunshine, from whence has come forth the ever-living 'Captain of our salvation.'

IV. The last lesson is the uselessness of a dead leader to a generation with new conflicts.

Commentators have spent a great deal of ingenuity in trying to assign reasons why God concealed the grave of Moses. The text does not say that God concealed it at all. The ignorance of the place of his sepulchre does not seem to have been part of the divine design, but simply a consequence of the circumstances of his death, and of the fact that he lay in an enemy's land, and that they had had something else to do than go to look for the grave of a dead commander. They had to conquer the land, and a living Joshua was what they wanted, not a dead Moses.

So we may learn from this how easily the gaps fill. 'Thirty days' mourning,' and says my text, with almost a bitter touch, 'so the days of mourning for Moses were ended.' A month of it, that was all; and then everybody turned to the new man that was appointed for the new work. God has many tools in His tool-chest, and He needs them all before the work is done. Joshua could no more have wielded Moses' rod than

Moses could have wielded Joshua's sword. The one did his work, and was laid aside. New circumstances required a new type of character—the smaller man better fitted for the rougher work. And so it always is. Each generation, each period, has its own men that do some little part of the work which has to be done, and then drop it and hand over the task to others. The division of labour is the multiplication of joy at the end, and 'he that soweth and he that reapeth rejoice together.'

But whilst the one grave tells us, 'This man served his generation by the will of God, and was laid asleep and saw corruption,' the other grave proclaims One whom all generations need, whose work is comprehensive and complete, who dies never. 'He liveth and was dead, and is alive for evermore.' Christ, and Christ alone, can never be antiquated. This day requires Him, and has in Him as complete an answer to all its necessities as if no other generation had ever possessed Him. He liveth for ever, and for ever is the Shepherd of men.

So Aaron dies and is buried on Hor, and Moses dies and is buried on Pisgah, and Joshua steps into his place, and, in turn, he disappears. The one eternal Word of God worked through them all, and came at last Himself in human flesh to be the Everlasting Deliverer, Redeemer, Founder of the Covenant, Lawgiver, Guide through the wilderness, Captain of the warfare, and all that the world or a single soul can need until the last generation has crossed the flood, and the wandering pilgrims are gathered in the land of their inheritance. The dead Moses pre-supposes and points to the living Christ. Let us take Him for our all-sufficing and eternal Guide.

THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

THE NEW LEADER'S COMMISSION

'Now after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord it came to pass, that the Lord spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying, 2. Moses My servant is dead: now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. 3. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. 4. From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea, toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast. 5. There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. 6. Be strong and of a good courage; for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land which I sware unto their fathers to give them. 7. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses My servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. 8. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. 9. Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest. 10. Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying, 11. Pass through the host, and command the people, saying, Prepare you victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go in to possess the land, which the Lord your God giveth you to possess it.'—JOSHUA i. 1-11.

THE closest connection exists between Deuteronomy and Joshua. The narrative may be read as running on without a break. It turns away from the lonely grave up on the mountain to the bustling camp and the new leader. No man is indispensable. God's work goes on uninterrupted. The instruments are changed, but the Master-hand is the same, and lays one tool aside and takes another out of the tool-chest as He will. Moses is dead,—what then? Does his death paralyse the march of the tribes? No; it is but the ground for the ringing command, '*Therefore* arise, go over this Jordan.' The immediate installation of his successor, and the uninterrupted continuance of the advance, do not mean that Moses is not honoured or is forgotten, for the narrative lovingly links his honorific title, 'the servant of the Lord,' with the mention of his death; and God Himself does the same, for he is thrice referred to in the divine command to Joshua, as the recipient of the promise of the conquest, as the example of the highest experience of God's all-sufficing companionship, and as the medium by which Israel received the law. Joshua steps into the empty place, receives the same great promise, is assured of the same Presence, and is to obey the same law. The change of leaders is great, but nothing else is changed; and even it is not so great as faint hearts in their sorrow are apt to think, for the real Leader lives, and Moses and Joshua alike are but the transmitters of His orders and His aids to Israel.

The first command given to Joshua was a trial of his faith, for 'Jordan was in flood' (Joshua iii. 15),—and how was that crowd to get across, when fords were impassable and ferry-boats were wanting, to say nothing of the watchful eyes that were upon them from the other bank? To cross a stream in the face of the enemy is a ticklish operation, even for modern armies; what must it have been, then, for Joshua and his horde? Not a hint is given him as to the means by which the crossing is to be made possible. He has Jehovah's command to do it, and Jehovah's promise to be with him, and that is to be enough. We too have sometimes to face undertakings which we cannot see how to carry through; but if we do see that the path is one appointed by God, and will boldly tread it, we may be quite sure that, when we come to what at present seems like a mountain wall across it, we shall find that the glen opens as we advance, and that there is a way,—narrow, perhaps, and dangerous, but practicable. 'One step enough for me' should be our motto. We may trust God not to command impossibilities, nor to lead us into a *cul de sac*.

The promise to Moses (Deut. ii. 24) is repeated almost verbally in verse 4. The boundaries of the land are summarily given as from 'the wilderness' in the south to 'this Lebanon' in the north, and from the Euphrates in the east to the Mediterranean in the west. 'The land of the Hittites' is not found in the original passage in Deuteronomy, and it seems to be a designation of the territory between Lebanon and the Euphrates, which we now know to have been the seat of the northern Hittites, while the southern branch was planted round Hebron and the surrounding district. But these wide boundaries were not attained till late in the history, and were not long retained. Did the promise, then, fail? No, for it, like all the promises, was contingent on conditions, and Israel's unfaithfulness cut short its extent of territory. We, too, fail to possess all the land destined for us. Our charter is much wider than our actual wealth. God gives more than we take, and we are content to occupy but a corner of the broad land which He has given us. In like manner Joshua did not realise to the full the following promise of uniform victory, but was defeated at Ai and elsewhere. The reason was the same,—the faithlessness of the people. Unbelief and sin turn a Samson into a weakling, and make Israel flee before the ranks of the Philistines.

The great encouragement given to Joshua in entering on his hard and perilous enterprise is twice repeated here: 'As I was with Moses, so will I be with thee.' Did Joshua remember how, nearly forty years since.

he had fronted the mob of cowards with the very same assurance, and how the answer had been a shower of stones? The cowards are all dead,—will their sons believe the assurance now? If we do believe that God is with us, we shall be ready to cross Jordan in flood, and to meet the enemies that are waiting on the other bank. If we do not, we shall not dare greatly, nor succeed in what we attempt. The small successes of material wealth and gratified ambition may be ours, but for all the higher duties and nobler conflicts that become a man, the condition of achievement and victory is steadfast faith in God's presence and help.

That assurance—which we may all have if we cling to Jesus, in whom God comes to be with every believing soul—is the only basis on which the command to Joshua, thrice repeated, can wisely or securely be rested. It is mockery to say to a man conscious of weakness, and knowing that there are evils which must surely come, and evils which may possibly come, against which he is powerless, 'Don't be afraid,' unless you can show him good reason why he need not be. And there is only one reason which can still reasonable dread in a human heart that has to front 'all the ills that flesh is heir to,' and sees behind them all the grim form of death. He ought to be afraid, unless—unless what? Unless he has heard and taken into his inmost soul the Voice that said to Joshua, 'I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee: be strong and of a good courage,' or, still more sweet and peace-bringing, the Voice that said to the frightened crew of the fishing-boat in the storm and the darkness, 'It is I; be not afraid.' If we know that Christ is with us, it is wise to be strong and courageous; if we are meeting the tempest alone, the best thing we can do is to fear, for the fear may drive us to seek for His help, and He ever stretches out His hand to him who is afraid, as he ought to be, when he feels the cold water rising above his knees, and by his very fear is driven to faith, and cries, 'Lord, save; I perish!'

Courage that does not rest on Christ's presence is audacity rather than courage, and is sure to collapse, like a pricked bladder, when the sharp point of a real peril comes in contact with it. If we sit down and reckon the forces that we have to oppose to the foes that we are sure to meet, we shall find ourselves unequal to the fight, and, if we are wise, shall 'send the ambassage' of a humble desire to the great King, who will come to our help with His all-conquering powers. Then, and only then, shall we be safe in saying, 'I will not fear what man can do unto me, or devils either,' when we have said, 'In God have I put my trust,' and have heard Him answering, 'I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

THE CHARGE TO THE SOLDIER OF THE LORD

'Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded thee . . . that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. 8. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.'—JOSHUA i. 7, 8.

This is the central portion of the charge given to the successor of Moses. Joshua was a very small man in comparison with his predecessor. He was no prophet nor constructive genius; he was not capable of the heights of communion and revelation which the lofty spirit of Moses was able to mount. He was only a plain, fiery soldier, with energy, swift decision, promptitude.

self-command, and all the military virtues in the highest degree. The one thing that he needed was tc be 'strong and courageous'; and over and over again in this chapter you will find that injunction pealed into his ears. He is the type of the militant servant of the Lord, and the charge to him embodies the duties of all such.

I. We have here the duty of courageous strength.

Christianity has altered the perspective of human virtues, has thrown the gentler ones into prominence altogether unknown before, and has dimmed the brilliancy of the old heroic type of character; but it has not struck those virtues out of its list. Whilst the perspective is altered, there is as much need in the lowliest Christian life for the loftiest heroism as ever there was. For in no mere metaphor, but in grim earnest, all Christian progress is conflict, and we have to fight, not only with the evils that are within, but, if we would be true to the obligations of our profession and loyal to the commands of our Master, we have to take our part in the great campaign which He has inaugurated and is ever carrying on against every abuse and oppression, iniquity and sin, that grinds down the world and makes our brethren miserable and servile. So, then, in these words we have directions in regard to a side of the Christian character, indispensable to-day as ever, and the lack of which cannot be made up for by any amount of sweet and contemplative graces.

Jesus Christ is the type of both. The Conqueror of Canaan and the Redeemer of the world bear the same name. The Jesus whom we trust was a Joshua. And let us learn the lesson that neither the conqueror of the typical and material land of promise nor the Redeemer who has won the everlasting heaven for our portion could do their work without the heroic side of human excellence being manifestly developed. Do you remember 'He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem'? Do you remember that the Apostle whom a hasty misconception has thought of as the gentlest of the Twelve, because he had most to say about love, is the Apostle that more emphatically than any other rings into our ears over and over again the thought of the Christ, militant and victorious, the Hero as well as the patient Sufferer, the 'Captain of our salvation'? And so let us recognise how both the gentler and the stronger graces, the pacific and the warlike side of human excellence, have their highest development in Jesus Christ, and learn that the firmest strength must be accompanied with the tenderest love and swathed in meekest gentleness. As another Apostle has it in his pregnant, brief injunctions, ringing and laconic like a general's word of command, 'Quit you like men! be strong! let all your deeds be done in love!' Braid the two things together, for the mightiest strength is the love that conquers hate, and the only love that is worthy of a man is the love that is strong to contend and to overcome.

'Be strong.' Then strength is a duty; then weakness is a sin. Then the amount of strength that we possess and wield is regulated by ourselves. We have our hands on the sluice. We may open it to let the whole full tide run in, or we may close it till a mere dribble reaches us. For the strength which *is* strength, and not merely weakness in a fever, is a strength derived, and ours because derived. The Apostle gives the complete version of the exhortation when he says: 'Finally, my brethren,' that Omega of command which is the Alpha of performance, 'be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.' Let Christ's strength in. Open the heart wide that it may come. Keep yourself in continual touch with God, the fountain of all power. Trust is strength, because trust touches the Rock of Ages.

For this reason the commandment to be strong and of good courage is in the text based upon this: 'As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee. I will not fail thee nor forsake thee.' Our strength depends on ourselves, because our strength is the fruit of our faith. And if we live with Him, grasping His hand and, in the realising consciousness of our own weakness, looking beyond ourselves, then power will come to us above our desire and equal to our need. The old victories of faith will be reproduced in us when we say with the ancient king, 'Lord! We know not what to do, but our eyes are up unto Thee.' Then He will come to us, to make us 'strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.' 'Wait on the Lord and He will strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord.'

But courage is duty, too, as well as strength. Power and the consciousness of power do not always go together. In regard to the strength of nature, courage and might are quite separable. There may be a strong coward and a weak hero. But in the spiritual region, strength and courage do go together. The consciousness of the divine power with us, and that alone, will make us bold with a boldness that has no taint of levity and presumption mingled with it, and never will overestimate its own strength. The charge to Joshua, then, not only insists upon the duty of strength, but on the duty of conscious strength, and on the duty of measuring the strength that is at my back with the weakness that is against me, and of being bold because I know that more and 'greater is He that is with me than are they that be with them.'

II. So much, then, for the first of the exhortations here. Now look next at the duty of implicit obedience to the word of command.

That is another soldierly virtue, the exercise of which sheds a nobility over the repulsive horrors of the battlefield. Joshua had to be fitted to command by learning to obey, and, like that other soldier whose rough trade had led him to some inkling of Christ's authority by its familiarising him with the idea of the strange power of the word of command, had to realise that he himself was 'under authority' before he could issue his orders.

Courage and strength come first, and on them follows the command to do all according to the law, to keep it without deflection to right or left, and to meditate on it day and night. These two virtues make the perfect soldier—courage and obedience. Daring and discipline must go together, and to know how to follow orders is as essential as to know how to despise dangers.

But the connection between these two, as set forth in this charge, is not merely that they must co-exist, but that courage and strength are needed for, and are to find their noblest field of exercise in, absolute acceptance of, and unhesitating, swift, complete, unmurmuring obedience to, everything that is discerned to be God's will and our duty.

For the Christian soldier, then, God's law is his marching orders. The written word, and especially the Incarnate Word, are our law of conduct. The whole science of our warfare and plan of campaign are there. We have not to take our orders from men's lips, but we must often disregard them, that we may listen to the 'Captain of our salvation.' The soldier stands where his officer has posted him, and does what he was bid, no matter what may happen. Only one voice can relieve him. Though a thousand should bid him flee, and his heart should echo their advices, he is recreant if he deserts his post at the command of any but him who set him there. Obedience to others is mutiny. Nor does the Christian need another law to supplement that which Christ has given him in His pattern and teaching. Men have appended huge comments to it, and have softened some of its plain precepts which bear hard on popular sins. But the Lawgiver's law is one thing, and the lawyers' explanations which explain it away or darken what was clear enough, however unwelcome, are quite another. Christ has given us Himself, and therein has given a sufficient directory for conduct and conflict which fits close to all our needs, and will prove definite and practical enough if we honestly try to apply it.

The application of Christ's law to daily life takes some courage, and is the proper field for the exercise of Christian strength. 'Be very courageous that thou mayest observe.' If you are not a bold Christian you will very soon get frightened out of obedience to your Master's commandments. Courage, springing from the realisation of God's helping strength, is indispensable to make any man, in any age, live out thoroughly and consistently the principles of the law of Jesus Christ. No man in *this* generation will work out a punctual obedience to what he knows to be the will of God, without finding out that all the 'Canaanites' are not dead yet; but that there are enough of them left to make a very thorny life for the persistent follower of Jesus Christ.

And not only is there courage needed for the application of the principles of conduct which God has given us, but you will never have them handy for swift application unless, in many a quiet hour of silent, solitary, patient meditation you have become familiar with them. The recruit that has to learn on the battle-field how to use his rifle has a good chance of being dead before he has mastered the mysteries of firing. And Christian people that have their Christian principles to dig out of the Bible when the necessity comes, will likely find that the necessity is past before they have completed the excavation. The actual battle-field is no place to learn drill. If a soldier does not know how his sword hangs, and cannot get at it in a moment, he will probably draw it too late.

I am afraid that the practice of such meditation as is meant here has come to be, like the art of making ecclesiastical stained glass, almost extinct in modern times. You have all so many newspapers and magazines to read that the Bible has a chance of being shoved out of sight, except on Sundays and in chapels. The 'meditating' that is enjoined in my text is no mere intellectual study of Scripture, either from an antiquarian or a literary or a theological point of view, but it is the mastering of the principles of conduct as laid down there, and the appropriating of all the power for guidance and for sustaining which that word of the Lord gives. Meditation, the familiarising ourselves with the ethics of Scripture, and with the hopes and powers that are treasured in Jesus Christ, so that our minds are made up upon a great many thorny questions as to what we ought to do, and that when crises or dangers come, as they have a knack of coming, very suddenly, and are sprung upon us unexpectedly, we shall be able, without much difficulty, or much time spent in perplexed searching, to fall back upon the principles that decide our conduct—that is essential to all successful and victorious Christian life.

And it is the secret of all blessed Christian life. For there is a lovely echo of these vigorous words of command to Joshua in a very much more peaceful form in the 1st Psalm: 'Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, . . . but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law doth he meditate day and night'—the very words that are employed in the text to describe the duty of the soldier—therefore 'all that he doeth shall prosper.'

III. That leads to the last thought here—the sure victory of such bold obedience.

'Thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest'; 'Thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then shalt thou have good success,' or, as the last word might be rendered, 'then shalt thou *act wisely*.' You may not get victory from an earthly point of view, for many a man that lives strong and courageous and joyfully obeying God's law, as far as he knows it and because he loves the Lawgiver, goes through life, and finds that, as far as the world's estimate is concerned, there is nothing but failure as his portion. Ah! but the world's way is not the true way of estimating victory. 'Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world,' said Jesus Christ when within arm's-length of the Cross. And His way is the way in which we must conquer the world, if we conquer it at all. The success which my text means is the carrying out of conscientious convictions of God's will into practice. That is the only success that is worth talking about or looking for. The man that succeeds in obeying and translating God's will into conduct is the victor, whatever be the outward fruits of his life. He may go out of the field beaten, according to the estimate of men that can see no higher than their own height, and little further than their own finger tips can reach; he may himself feel that the world has gone past him, and that he has not made much of it; he may have to lie down at last unknown, poor, with all his bright hopes that danced before him in childhood gone, and sore beaten by the enemies; but if he is able to say in the strength that Christ gives, 'I have finished my course; I have kept the faith,' his 'way has prospered,' and he has had 'good success.' 'We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.'

THE UNTRODDEN PATH AND THE GUIDING ARK

'Come not near unto the ark, that ye may know the way by which ye must go: for ye have not passed this way heretofore.'—JOSHUA iii. 4.

IT was eminently true of Israel that they had 'not passed this way heretofore,' inasmuch as the path which was opening before them, through the oozy bed of the river, had never been seen by human eye, nor trodden by man's foot. Their old leader was dead. There were only two of the whole host that had ever been out of the desert in their lives. They had a hard task before them. Jericho lay there, gleaming across the plain, among the palm-trees, backed by the savage cliffs, up the passes in which they would have to fight their way. So that we need not wonder that, over and over again, in these early chapters of this book, the advice is reiterated, 'Be of good courage. Be strong and fear not!' They needed special guidance, and they received very special guidance, and my text tells us what they had to do, in order to realise the full blessing and guidance that was given them. 'Let there be a space of 2000 cubits by measure between you and the ark'—three-quarters of a mile or thereabouts—'do not press close upon the heels of the bearers, for you will not be able to see where they are going if you crowd on them. Be patient. Let the course of the ark disclose itself before you try to follow it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go, for ye have not passed this way heretofore.'

I. Note the untrodden path.

I suppose that most of us have to travel a very well-worn road, and that our course, in the cases of all except those in early life, is liker that of a millhorse than an untrodden path. Most of us are continually treading again in the prints of our own footsteps. A long, weary stretch of monotonous duties, and the repetition of the same things to-day that we did yesterday is the destiny of most of us.

Some of us, perhaps, may be standing upon the verge of some new scenes in our lives. Some of you young people may have come up to a great city for the first time to carve out a position for yourselves, and are for the first time encompassed by the temptations of being unknown in a crowd. Some of you may be in new domestic circumstances, some with new sorrows, or tasks, or difficulties pressing upon you, calling for wisdom and patience. It is quite likely that there may be some who, in the most prosaic and literal sense of the words, are entering on a path altogether new and untrodden. But they will be in the minority, and for the most of us the days that were full of new possibilities are at an end, and we have to expect little more than the monotonous repetition of the habitual, humdrum duties of mature life. We have climbed the winding paths up the hill, and most of us are upon the long plateau that stretches unvaried, until it begins to dip at the further edge. And some of us are going down that other side of the hill.

But whatever may be the variety in regard to the mere externals of our lives, how true it is about us all that even the most familiar duties of to-day are not quite like the same duties when they had to be done yesterday; and that the path for each of us—though, as we go along, we find in it nothing new—is yet an untrodden path! For we are not quite the same as we were yesterday, though our work may be the same, and the difference in us makes it in some measure different.

But what mainly makes even the most well-beaten paths new at the thousandth time of traversing them is our ignorance of what may be waiting round the next turn of the road. The veil that hangs before and hides the future is a blessing, though we sometimes grumble at it, and sometimes petulantly try to make pinholes through it, and peep in to see a little of what is behind it. It brings freshness into our lives, and a possibility of anticipation, and even of wonder and expectation, that prevents us from stagnating. Even in the most habitual repetition of the same tasks 'ye have not passed this way heretofore.' And life for every one of us is still full of possibilities so great and so terrible that we may well feel that the mist that covers the future is a blessing and a source of strength for us all.

Our march through time is like that of men in a mist, in which things loom in strangely distorted shapes, unlike their real selves, until we get close up to them, and only then do we discover them.

So for us all the path is new and unknown by reason of the sudden surprises that may be sprung upon us, by reason of the sudden temptations that may start up at any moment in our course, by reason of the earthquakes that may shatter the most solid-seeming lives, by reason of the sudden calamities that may fall upon us. The sorrows that we anticipate seldom come, and those that do come are seldom anticipated. The most fatal bolts are generally from the blue. One flash, all unlooked for, is enough to blast the tree in all its leafy pride. Many of us, I have no doubt, can look back to times in our lives when, without anticipation on our parts, or warning from anything outside of us, a smiting hand fell upon some of our blessings. The morning dawned upon the gourd in full vigour of growth, and in the evening it was stretched yellow and wilted upon the turf. Dear brethren, anything may come out of that dark cloud through which our life's course has to pass, and there are some things concerning which all that we know is that they must come.

These are very old threadbare thoughts; I dare say you think it was not worth your while to come to hear them, nor mine to speak them; but if we would lay them to heart, and realise how true it is about every step of our earthly course that 'ye have not passed this way heretofore,' we should complain less than we do of the weariness and prosaic character of our commonplace lives, and feel that all was mystical and great and awful; and yet most blessed in its possibilities and its uncertainties.

II. Note, again, the guiding ark.

It was a new thing that the ark should become the guide of the people. All through the wilderness, according to the history, it had been carried in the centre of the march, and had had no share in the direction of the course. That had been done by the pillar of cloud. But, just as the manna ceased when the tribes got across the Jordan and could eat the bread of the land, the miracle ending and they being left to trust to ordinary means of supply at the earliest possible moment, so there ensued an approximation to ordinary guidance, which is none the less real because it is granted without miracle. The pillar of cloud ceased to move before the people in the crossing of the Jordan, and its place was taken by the material symbol of the presence of God, which contained the tables of the law as the basis of the covenant. And that ark moved at the commandment of the leader Joshua, for he was the mouthpiece of the divine will in the matter. And so when the ark moved at the bidding of the leader, and became the guide of the people, there was a kind of a drop down from the pure supernatural of the guiding pillar.

For us a similar thing is true. Jesus Christ is the true Ark of God. For what was the ark? the symbol of the divine Presence; and Christ is the reality of the divine Presence with men. The whole content of that ark was the 'law of the Lord,' and Jesus Christ is the embodied law of the present God. The ark was the sign that God had entered into this covenant with these people, and that they had a right to say to Him, 'Thou art our God, and we are Thy people,' and the same double assurance of reciprocal possession and mutual delight in possession is granted to us in and through Jesus Christ our Lord.

So He becomes the guiding Ark, the Shepherd of Israel. His presence and will are our directors. The law, which is contained and incorporated in Him, is that by which we are to walk. The covenant which He has established in His own blood between God and man contains in itself not only the direction for conduct, but also the motives which will impel us to walk where and as He enjoins.

And so, every way we may say, by His providences which He appoints, by His example which He sets us, by His gracious word in which He sums up all human duties in the one sweet obligation, 'Follow Me,' and even more by His Spirit that dwells in us, and whispers in our ears, 'This is the way; walk ye in it,' and enlightens every perplexity, and strengthens all feebleness, and directs our footsteps into the way of peace; that living and personal Ark of the covenant of the Lord of the whole earth is still the guide of waiting and docile hearts. Jesus Christ's one word to us is, 'If any man serve Me, let him follow Me. And where I am'—of course, seeing he is a follower—'there shall also My servant be.'

The one Pattern for us, the one Example that we need to follow, the one Strength in our perplexities, the true Director of our feet, is that dear Lord, if we will only listen to Him. And that direction will be given to us in regard to the trifles, as in regard to the great things of our lives.

III. And so the last thought that is here is the watchful following.

'Come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye ought to go.' In a shipwreck, the chances are that the boats will be swamped by the people scrambling into them in too great a hurry. In th

Christian life most of the mistakes that people make arise from their not letting the ark go far enough ahead of them before they gather up their belongings and follow it. An impatience of the half-declared divine will, a running before we are sent, an acting before we are quite sure that God wills us to do so-and-so, are at the root of most of the failures of Christian effort, and of a large number of the miseries of Christian men. If we would only have patience! Three-quarters of a mile the ark went ahead before a man lifted a foot to follow it, and there was no mistake possible then.

Now do not be in a hurry to act. 'Raw haste' is 'half-sister to delay.' We are all impatient of uncertainty, either in opinion or in conduct; but if you are not quite sure what God wants you to do, you may be quite sure that He does not at present want you to do anything. Wait till you see what He does wish you to do. Better, better far, to spend hours in silent—although people that know nothing about what we are doing may call it indolent—waiting for the clear declaration of God's will, than to hurry on paths which, after we have gone on them far enough to make it a mortification and a weariness to turn back, we shall find out to have been not His at all, but only our own mistakes as to where the ark would have us go.

And that there may be this patience the one thing needful—as, indeed, it is the one thing needful for all strength of all kinds in the Christian life—is the rigid suppression of our own wills. That is the secret of goodness, and its opposite is the secret of evil. To live by my own will is to die. Nothing but blunders, nothing but miseries, nothing but failures, nothing but remorse, will be the fruit of such a life. And a great many of us who call ourselves Christians are not Christians in the sense of having Christ's will for our absolute law, and keeping our own will entirely in subordination thereto. As is the will, so is the man, and whoever does not bow himself absolutely, and hush all the babble of his own inclinations and tastes and decisions, in order that that great Voice may speak, has small chance of ever walking in the paths of righteousness, or finding that his ways please the Lord.

Suppress your own wills, dwell near God, that you may hear His lightest whisper. 'I will guide thee with Mine eye.' What is the use of the glance of an eye if the man for whom it is meant is half a mile off, and staring about him at everything except the eye that would guide? And that is what some of us that call ourselves Christian people are. God might look guidance at us for a week, and we should never know that He was doing it; we have so many other things to look after. And we are so far away from Him that it would need a telescope for us to see His face. 'I will guide thee with Mine eye.' Keep near Him, and you will not lack direction.

And so, dear brethren, if we stay ourselves on, and wait patiently for, Him, and are content to do what He wishes, and never to run without a clear commission, nor to act without a full conviction of duty, then the old story of my text will repeat itself in our daily life, as well as in the noblest form in the last act of life, which is death. The Lord will move before us and open a safe, dry path for us between the heaped waters; and where the feet of our great High Priest, bearing the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, stood, amidst the slime and the mud, we may plant our firm feet on the stones that He has left there. And so the stream of life, like the river of death, will be parted for Christ's followers, and they will pass over on dry ground, 'until all the people are passed clean over Jordan.'

'THE WATERS SAW THEE; THEY WERE AFRAID'

'And Joshua said unto the people, Sanctify yourselves: for to morrow the Lord will do wonders among you. 6. And Joshua spake unto the priests, saying, Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass over before the people. And they took up the ark of the covenant, and went before the people. 7. And the Lord said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee. 8. And thou shalt command the priests that bear the ark of the covenant, saying, When ye are come to the brink of the water of Jordan, ye shall stand still in Jordan. 9. And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, Come hither, and hear the words of the Lord your God. 10. And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites, and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Jebusites. 11. Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth passeth over before you into Jordan. 12. Now therefore take you twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, out of every tribe a man. 13. And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon an heap. 14. And it came to pass, when the people removed from their tents, to pass over Jordan, and the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people; 15. And as they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped in the brim of the water, (for Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest,) 16. That the waters which came down from above stood and rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam, that is beside Zaretan: and those that came down toward the sea of the plain, even the salt sea, failed, and were cut off: and the people passed over right against Jericho. 17. And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan.'—JOSHUA iii. 5-17.

THE arrangement of the narrative of the passage of Jordan, which occupies chapters iii. and iv., is remarkable, and has led to suggestions of interpolation and blending of two accounts, which are quite unnecessary. It is divided into four sections,—the preparations (Joshua iii. 1-6), the passage (Joshua iii. 7-17), the lifting of the memorial stones from the river's bed and the fixing of one set of them in it (Joshua iv. 1-14), the return of the waters, and the erection of the second set of memorial stones at Gilgal (Joshua iv. 15-24).

Each section closes with a summary of the whole transaction, after the common manner of Old Testament history, which gives to a hasty reader the impression of confusion and repetition; but a little attention shows a very symmetrical arrangement, negativing the possibility of interpolation. The last three sections are all built on the same lines. In each there is a triple division,—God's command to Joshua, Joshua's communication of it to the people, and the actual fact, fulfilling these. So each stage passes thrice before the view, and the impressiveness of the history is heightened by our seeing it first in the mirror of the divine Word, and then in the orders of the commander, before we see it as a thing actually happening.

Verses 5 and 6 of the chapter belong to the section which deals with the preparation. General instructions had been already issued that the host was to follow the ark, leaving two thousand cubits between them and it; but nothing had been said as to how Jordan was to be crossed. No doubt many a question and doubt had been muttered by the watch-fires, as the people looked at the muddy, turbid stream, swirling in flood. The spies probably managed to swim it, but that was a feat worthy to be named in the epitaph of heroes (1 Chron. xii. 15), and impossible for the crowd of all ages and both sexes which followed Joshua. There was the rushing stream, swollen as it always is in harvest. How were they to get over? And if the people of Jericho, right over against them, chose to fall upon them as they were struggling across, what could hinder utter defeat? No doubt. all that was canvassed, in all sorts of tones; but no inkling of the miracle seems to have been given.

God often opens His hand by one finger at a time, and leaves us face to face with some plain but difficult duty, without letting us see the helps to its performance, till we need to use them. If we go right on the road which He has traced out, it will never lead us into a blind alley. The mountains will part before us as we come near what looked their impassable wall; and some narrow gorge or other, wide enough to run a track through, but not wide enough to be noticed before we are close on it, will be sure to open. The attitude of expectation of God's help, while its nature is unrevealed, is kept up in Joshua's last instruction. The people are bidden to 'sanctify themselves, because to-morrow the Lord will do wonders' among them. That sanctifying was not external, but included the hallowing of spirit by docile waiting for His intervention, and by obedience while the manner of it was hidden. The secret of to-morrow is partly made known, and the faith of the people is nourished by the mystery remaining, as well as by the light given. The best security for to-morrow's wonders is to-day's sanctifying.

The command to the priests discloses to them a little more, in bidding them pass over before the people, but the additional disclosure would only be an additional trial of faith; for the silence as to how so impossible a command was to be made possible is absolute. The swollen river had obliterated all fords; and how were priests, staggering under the weight of the ark on their shoulders, to 'pass over'? The question is not answered till the ark is on their shoulders. To-day often sees to-morrow's duty without seeing how it is to be done. But the bearers of the ark need never fear but that the God to whom it belongs will take care of it and of them. The last sentence of verse 6 is the anticipatory summary which closes each section.

In verses 7-17 we have the narrative of the actual crossing, in its three divisions of God's command (vs. 7-8), Joshua's repetition of it (vs. 9-13), and the historical fact (vs. 14-17). The final instructions were only given on the morning of the day of crossing. The report of God's commands given in verses 7 and 8 is condensed, as is evident from the fuller statement of them in Joshua's address to the people, which immediately follows. In it Joshua is fully aware of the manner of the miracle and of the details of the crossing, but we have no record of his having received them. The summary of that eventful morning's instructions to him emphasises first the bearing of the miracle on his reputation. The passage of the Red Sea had authenticated the mission of Moses to the past generation, who, in consequence of it, 'believed God and His servant Moses.' The new generation are to have a parallel authentication of Joshua's commission. It is noteworthy that this is not the purpose of the miracle which the leader announces to the people in verse 10. It was a message from God to himself, a kind of gracious whisper meant for his own encouragement. What a thought to fill a man's heart with humble devotion, that God would work such a wonder in order to demonstrate that He was with him! And what a glimpse of more to follow lay in that promise, 'This day will I *begin* to magnify thee!'

The command to the priests in verse 8 is also obviously condensed; for Joshua's version of it, which follows, is much more detailed, and contains particular instructions, which must have been derived from the divine word to him on that morning.

We may pass on, then, to the second division of the narrative; namely, Joshua's communication of God's commands to the people. Observe the form which the purpose of the miracle assumes there. It is the confirmation of the divine Presence, not with the leader, but with the people and their consequent victory. Joshua grasped the inmost meaning of God's Word to himself, and showed noble self-suppression, when he thus turned the direction of the miracle. The true servant of God knows that God is with him, not for his personal glorification, but for the welfare of God's people, and cares little for the estimation in which men hold him, if they will only believe that the conquering God is with them. We too often make great leaders and teachers in the church opaque barriers to hide God from us, instead of transparent windows through which He shines upon His people. We are a great deal more ready to say, 'God is with him,' than to add, 'and therefore God is with us, in our Joshuas, and without them.'

Observe the grand emphasis of that name, 'the living God,' tacitly contrasted with the dead idols of the enemies, and sealing the assurance of His swift and all-conquering might. Observe, too, the triumphant contempt in the enumeration of the many tribes of the foe with their barbarous names. Five of them had been enough, when named by the spies' trembling lips, to terrify the congregation, but here the list of the whole seven but strengthens confidence. Faith delights to look steadily at its enemies, knowing that the one Helper is more than they all. This catalogue breathes the same spirit as Paul's rapturous list of the foes impotent to separate from the love of God. Mark, too, the long-drawn-out designation of the ark, with its accumulation of nouns, which grammatical purists have found difficult,—'the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth'; where it leads they need not fear to follow. It was the pledge of His presence, it contained the Ten Words on which His covenant was concluded. That covenant enlisted on their side Him who was Lord of the swollen river as of all the fierce clans beyond; and with His ark in front, their victory was sure. If ever the contemplation of His power and covenant relation was in place, it was on that morning, as Israel stood ranked for the march that was to lead them through Jordan, and to plant their feet on the soil of Canaan. Nor must we omit the peculiar appropriateness of this solemn designation, on the occasion of the ark's first becoming the leader of the march. Hitherto it had been carried in the centre; now it was moved to the van, and took the place of the pillar, which blazed no more. But the guidance was no less divine. The simple coffer which Bezaleel had made was as august and reliable a symbol of God's presence as the pillar; and the tables of the law, shut in it, were henceforth to be the best directors of the nation.

Then follows the command to elect twelve representatives of the tribes, for a purpose not yet explained; and then, at the last moment, the manner of crossing is disclosed, to the silencing of wise doubters and the confirmation of ignorant faith. The brief anticipatory announcement of the miracle puts stress on the arrest of the waters at the instant when the priests' feet touched them, and tells what is to befall the arrested torrent above the point where the ark stood, saying nothing about the lower stretch of the river, and just hinting by one word 'heap,' the parallel between this miracle and that of the passing of the Red Sea: 'The floods stood upright as an heap' (Exod. xv. 8).

Verses 14-17 narrate the actual crossing. One long sentence, like the roll of an Atlantic wave, or a long-drawn shout of triumph, masses together the stages of the march; the breaking up of the encampment; the solemn advance of the ark, watched by the motionless crowd; its approach to the foaming stream, running bank-full, as is its wont in the early harvest months; the decisive moment when the naked feet of the priests were dipped in the water. What a hush of almost painful expectation would fall on the gazers! Then, with a rush of triumph, the long sentence pours on, like a river escaping from some rocky gorge, and tells the details of the transcendent fact. Looking up stream, the water 'stood'; and, as the flow above went on, it was dammed up, and, as would appear, swept back to a point not now known, but apparently some miles up. Looking down the course, the water flowed naturally to the Dead Sea; and, in effect, the whole bed southwards was quickly left bare, giving room for the advance of the people with wide-extended front, while the priests, with the ark on their shoulders, stood silent in the midst of the bed, between the heaped waters and the hasting host. Verse 17 gives the usual summary sentence, which partly anticipates what is still to follow, but here comes in with special force, as gathering up the whole wonderful scene, and recounting once more, and not without a ring of astonished triumph, how the priests stood firm on dry ground in that strange place, 'until all the nation were passed clean over Jordan.'

From verses 7 and 10 we learn the purpose of this miracle as being twofold. It was intended to stamp the seal of God's approbation on Joshua, and to hearten the people by the assurance of God's fighting for them. The leader was thereby put on the level of Moses, the people, on that of the generation before whom the Red Sea had been divided. The parallel with that event is obvious and significant. The miracle which led Israel into the wilderness is repeated as they pass from it. The first stage of their deliverance and the second are begun with analogous displays of divine power. The same arm which cleft the sea is stretched out, after all sins, for the new generation, and 'is not shortened that it cannot save.' God does not disdain to duplicate His wonders, even for very unworthy servants. The unchanging, long-suffering patience, and the unwearied strength to which all generations in succession can turn with confidence, are wonderfully set forth by these two miracles. And though we have passed into the higher stage, where miracles have ceased, the principle which dictated the parallelism still holds good, and we too can look back to all these ancient wonders, and be sure that they are done over and over again according to our needs. 'As we have heard, so have we seen,' might have been Israel's song that day, as it may be ours every day.

The beautiful application made of the parted waters of Jordan in Christian literature, which sees in them the prophecy of conquered death, is perhaps scarcely in accordance with truth, for the divided Jordan was the introduction, not to peace, but to warfare. But it is too deeply impressed on the heart to be lightly put aside, and we may well allow faith and hope to discern in the stream, whose swollen waters shrink backwards as soon as the ark is borne into their turbid and swift current, an emblem of that dark flood that rolled between the host of God and their home, and was dried up as soon as the pierced foot of the Christ touched its cold waters.

'What ailest thee, thou sea, that thou fleest; thou Jordan, that thou turnest back?' Christ has gone up before us. He has shaken His hand over the river, and caused men to go over dry shod.

STONES CRYING OUT

'For the priests which bare the ark stood in the midst of Jordan, until every thing was finished that the Lord commanded Joshua to speak unto the people, according to all that Moses commanded Joshua: and the people hasted and passed over. 11. And it came to pass, when all the people were clean passed over, that the ark of the Lord passed over, and the priests, in the presence of the people. 12. And the children of Reuben, and the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh, passed over armed before the children of Israel, as Moses spake unto them: 13. About forty thousand prepared for war passed over before the Lord unto battle, to the plains of Jericho. 14. On that day the Lord magnified Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they feared Moses, all the days of his life. 15. And the Lord spake unto Joshua, saying, 16. Command the priests that bare the ark of the testimony, that they come up out of Jordan. 17. Joshua therefore commanded the priests, saying, Come ye up out of Jordan. 18. And it came to pass, when the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord were come up out of the midst of Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet were lifted up unto the dry land, that the waters of Jordan returned unto their place, and flowed over all his banks, as they did before. 19. And the people came up out of Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and encamped in Gilgal, in the east border of Jericho. 20. And those twelve stones, which they took out of Jordan, did Joshua pitch in Gilgal. 21. And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? 22. Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. 23. For the Lord your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red sea, which He dried up from before us, until we were gone over: 24. That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the Lord your God for ever.'—JOSHUA iv. 10-24.

THIS chapter is divided into two sections. The first (from verses 1 to 14) has as its main subject the bringing up of the twelve memorial stones from the bed of Jordan; the second (verse 15 to the end) gives the conclusion of the whole incident. The plan of arrangement, already pointed out in a former chapter, is very plain in this. Each section has God's commands to Joshua, Joshua's to the people, and the execution of these. To each is appended a summary, which anticipates the more detailed particulars that follow. Our text begins in the middle of the first section, but we must glance at the preceding verses. These tell how, when the people were all across, Joshua, who had apparently remained on the eastern bank with the twelve representatives of the tribes, received God's command to tell these the purpose for which they had been chosen, and to set them to execute it. This additional instruction is the explanation of the apparent discrepancy between Joshua iii. 12 and iv. 2. Verses 4-8 tell Joshua's communication of the instructions to the men; verse 8 narrates the execution of them by each man's wrenching up from the river's bed a great stone, with which he toiled through the muddy ooze to the western shore, and thence over the hot plain to Gilgal, where the host camped; verse 9 tells that twelve other stones were set up where the priests had stood, and were visible at some time after date, when it was written; but when that was, or whether the verse is part of the original or a later note, we cannot say. At any rate, there were two memorials, one on the bank, one in the stream—'a grand jury of great stones,' as Thomas Fuller calls them. There is no difficulty in supposing that the monument in the river was firm enough to resist its current, and high enough to be visible either above the surface or beneath the ordinarily shallow water.

I. The first picture here brought before us is that of the motionless ark in the midst of what had been Jordan. There is an obvious intention to contrast the stillness of the priests, bearing it on their shoulders, and standing rooted in that strange place all these long hours, with the hurry around. 'The priests stood . . . and the people hasted.' However broad the front and swift the march, the crossing must have taken many hours. The haste was not from fear, but eagerness. It was 'an industrious speed and mannerly quickness, as not willing to make God wait upon them, in continuing a miracle longer than necessity did require.' When all were over, then came the twelve and Joshua, who would spend some time in gathering the stones and rearing the memorial in the river-bed. Through all the stir the ark was still. Over all the march it watched. So long as one Israelite was in the channel it remained, a silent presence, to ensure his safety. It let their rate of speed determine the length of its standing there. It waited for the slowest foot and the weariest laggard. God makes His 'very present help' of the same length as our necessities, and lets us beat the time to which He conforms. Not till the last loiterer has struggled to the farther shore does He cease by His presence to keep His people safe on the strange road which by His presence He has opened for them.

The silent presence of the ark is enough to dam up the stream. There is vehement action around, but the cause of it all is in absolute repose. God moves all things, Himself unmoved. He 'worketh hitherto,' and no intensity of energy breaks the depth of His perfect rest. His activity implies no effort, and is followed by no exhaustion. The ark is still, while it holds back a swollen river for hours. The centre of the swiftest revolution is a point of rest.

The form of the miracle was a condescension to weak faith, to which help was ministered by giving sense something to grasp. It was easier to believe that the torrent would not rush down on them when they could look at the priests standing there motionless, with the visible symbol of God's presence on their shoulders. The ark was no more the cause of the miracle than were its carriers; but, just as Jesus helped one blind man by laying moistened earth on his eyes, and another by sending him to Siloam to wash, so God did here. Children learn best when they have something to look at. Sight is sometimes the servant of faith.

We need not dwell on the summary, beginning with verse 11, which anticipates the subject of the next section, and adds that the fighting men of the tribes who had already received their inheritance on the east bank of Jordan, loyally kept their promise, and marched with their brethren to the campaign.

II. Verses 15-18 finish the story with the return of the waters to their bed. The triple division appears again. First God commands Joshua, who then transmits the command to the people, who, in turn, then obey. And thus at each stage the divine causality, Joshua's delegated but absolute authority, and the people's prompt obedience, are signalised; and the whole incident, in all its parts, is set forth as on the one hand a conspicuous instance of God's interposition, and, on the other, of Israel's willing service.

We can fancy how the people who had reached the western shore lined the bank, gazing on the group in the channel, who still stood waiting God's command to relieve them at their post. The word comes at last, and is immediately obeyed. May we not learn the lesson to stand fixed and patient wherever God sets us, as long as He does not call us thence? God's priests should be like the legionary on guard in Pompeii, who stuck to his post while the ashes were falling thick, and was smothered by them, rather than leave his charge without his commander's orders. One graphic word pictures the priests lifting, or, as it might be translated, 'plucking,' the soles of their feet from the slimy bottom into which they had settled down by reason of long standing still. They reach the bank, marching as steadily with their sacred burden as might be over so rough and slippery a road. The first to enter were the last to leave the river's bed. God's ark 'goes before us,' and 'is our rearward.' He besets us behind and before, and all dangerous service is safe if begun and ended in Him. The one point made prominent is the instantaneous rush back of the impatient torrent as soon as the curb was taken off. Like some horse rejoicing to be free, the tawny flood pours down, and soon everything looks 'as aforetime,' except for the new rock, piled by human hands, round which the waters chafed. The dullest would understand what had wrought the miracle when they saw the immediate consequence of the ark's leaving its place. Cause and effect seldom come thus close together in God's dealings; but sometimes He lets us see them as near each other as the lightning and the thunder, that we may learn to trace them in faith, when centuries part them. How the people would gaze as the hurrying stream covered up their path, and would look across to the further shore, almost doubting if they had really stood there that morning! They were indeed 'Hebrews'—men from the other side—now, and would set themselves to the dangerous task before them with courage. 'Well begun is half done'; and God would not divide the river for them to thrust them into a tiger's den, where they would be torn to pieces. Retreat was impossible now. A new page in their history was turned. The desert was as unreachable as Egypt. The passage of the Jordan rounded off the epoch which the passage of the Red Sea introduced, and began a new era.

That parallelism of the two crossings is suggested by the notice of date in verse 19. 'The tenth day of the first month' was just forty years to a day since the first Paschal lamb had been chosen, and four days short of the Passover, which was solemnised at Gilgal (Joshua v. 10) where they encamped that night. It was a short march from the point of crossing, and a still shorter from Jericho. It would have been easy to fall upon the invaders as they straggled across the river, but no attempt was made to dispute the passage, though, no doubt, many a keen pair of eyes watched it from the neighbouring hills. In the beginning of the next chapter we are told why there was this singular supineness. 'Their heart melted, neither was there spirit in them any more,' or, in more modern language, panic laid hold of the enemy, and they could not pluck up courage to oppose the advance of Israel. If we add this result to those mentioned in chapter iii., we find sufficient motive for the miracle to take it out of the class of purposeless, legendary wonders. Given the importance of Israel as the depositaries of revelation, there is nothing unreasonable in a miracle which so powerfully contributed to their conquest of Canaan, and we have yet to learn that there is anything unreasonable in the belief that they *were* the depositaries of revelation. The fundamental postulate of the Old Testament is a supernatural revelation, and that opens the door for any miracle needful for its accomplishment. It is folly to seek to conciliate by minimising the miraculous element. However much may be thrown out to the wolves, they will not cease to pursue and show their teeth. We should be very slow to pronounce on what is worthy of God; but any man who believes in a divine revelation, given to the world through Israel, may well believe in such a miracle as this at such a moment of their history.

III. The memorial stones (verses 20-24). Gilgal, the first encampment, lay defenceless in the open plain, and the first thing to be done would be to throw up some earthwork round the camp. It seems to have been the resting-place of the ark and probably of the non-combatants, during the conquest, and to have derived thence a sacredness which long clung to it, and finally led, singularly enough, to its becoming a centre of idolatrous worship. The rude circle of unhewn stones without inscription was, no doubt, exactly like the many prehistoric monuments found all over the world, which forgotten races have raised to keep in everlasting remembrance forgotten fights and heroes. It was a comparatively small thing; for each stone was but a load for one man, and it would seem mean enough by the side of Stonehenge or Carnac, just as Israel's history is on a small scale, as compared with the world-embracing empires of old. Size is not greatness; and Joshua's little circle told a more wonderful story than its taller kindred, or Egyptian obelisks or colossi.

These grey stones preached at once the duty of remembering, and the danger of forgetting, the past mercies of God. When they were reared, they would seem needless; but the deepest impressions get filled up by degrees, as the river of time deposits its sands on them. We do not forget pain so quickly as joy, and most men have a longer and keener remembrance of their injurers than of their benefactors, human or divine. The stones were set up because Israel remembered, but also lest Israel should forget. We often think of the Jews as monsters of ingratitude; but we should more truly learn the lesson of their history, if we regarded them as fair, average men, and asked ourselves whether our recollection of God's goodness to us is much more vivid than theirs. Unless we make distinct and frequent efforts to recall, we shall certainly forget 'all His benefits.' The cultivation of thankful remembrance is a very large part of practical religion; and it is not by accident that the Psalmist puts it in the middle, between hope and obedience, when he says, 'that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments' (Psalm lxxviii. 7).

The memorial stones further proclaimed the duty of parental instruction in God's mercies. They speak of a time when tradition was the vehicle of history; when books were rare, and monuments were relied upon to awaken curiosity which a father's words would satisfy. Notwithstanding all differences in means of obtaining knowledge, the old law remains in full force, that the parent is the natural and most powerful instructor in the ways of God. The Jewish father was not to send his child to some Levite or other to get his question answered, but was to answer it himself. I am afraid that a good many English parents, who call themselves Christians, are too apt to say, 'Ask your Sunday-school teacher,' when such questions are put to them. The decay of parental religious teaching is working enormous mischief in Christian households; and the happiest results would follow if Joshua's homely advice were attended to, '*Ye* shall let your children know.'

The same principle which led to the erection of this simple monument reaches its highest and sacredest instance in the institution of the Lord's Supper, in which Jesus, with wonderful lowliness, condescends to avail Himself of material symbols in order to secure a firmer place in treacherous memories. He might well have expected that such stupendous love could never be forgotten; but He 'knoweth our frame,' and trusts some share in keeping His death vividly in the hearts of His people to the humble ministry of bread and wine. Strange that we should need to be reminded of the death which it is life to remember! Blessed that, needing it, we have the need so tenderly met, and that He does not disdain to accept loving memories which slumber till stirred by such poor reminders of His unspeakable love!

THE CAPTAIN OF THE LORD'S HOST

And he said, Nay, but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come.
JOSHUA v. 14.

THE army of Israel was just beginning a hard conflict under an untried leader. Behind them the Jordan barred their retreat, in front of them Jericho forbade their advance. Most of them had never seen a fortified city, and had no experience nor engines for a siege. So we may well suppose that many doubts and fears shook the courage of the host, as it drew around the doomed city. Their chief had his own heavy burden. He seems to have gone apart to meditate on what his next step was to be. Absorbed in thought, he lifts up his eyes mechanically, as brooding men will, not expecting to see anything, and is startled by the silent figure of 'a man with a sword drawn' in his hand, close beside him. There is nothing supernatural in his appearance; and the immediate thought of the leader is, 'Is this one of the enemy that has stolen upon my solitude?' So, promptly and boldly, he strides up to him with the quick challenge: 'Whose side are you on? Are you one of us, or from the enemy's camp?' And then the silent lips open. 'Upon neither the one nor the other. I am not on your side, you are on mine, for as *Captain* of the Lord's host, am I come up.' And then Joshua falls on his face, recognises his Commander-in-Chief, owns himself a subordinate, and asks for orders. 'What saith my Lord unto his servant?'

Now let us try to gather the meaning and the lessons of this striking incident.

I. I see in it a transient revelation of an eternal truth.

I believe, as the vast majority of careful students of the course of Old Testament revelation and its relation to the New Testament completion believe, that we have here not a record of the appearance of a created superhuman person, but that of a preliminary manifestation of the Eternal Word of God, who, in the fulness of time, 'became flesh and dwelt among us.'

You will observe that there run throughout the whole of the Old Testament notices of the occasional manifestation of a mysterious person who is named '*the* Angel,' 'the Angel of the Lord.' For instance, in the great scene in the wilderness, where the bush burned and was not consumed, he who appeared is named 'the Angel of the Lord'; and his lips declare 'I am that I am.' In like manner, soon after, the divine voice speaks to Moses of 'the Angel in whom is My name.'

When Balaam had his path blocked amongst the vineyards, it was a *replica* of the figure of my text that stayed his way, a man with a drawn sword in his hand, who spoke in autocratic and divine fashion. When the parents of Samson were apprised of the coming birth of the hero, it was 'the Angel of the Lord' that appeared to them, accepted their sacrifice, declared the divine will, and disappeared in a flame of fire from the altar. A psalm speaks of 'the Angel of the Lord' as encamping round about them that fear him, and delivering them. Isaiah tells us of the 'Angel of his face,' who was 'afflicted in all Israel's afflictions, and saved them.' And the last prophetic utterance of the Old Testament is most distinct and remarkable in its strange identification and separation of Jehovah and the Angel, when it says, 'the Lord shall suddenly come to His Temple, even the Angel of the Covenant.' Now, if we put all these passages—and they are but select instances—if we put all these passages together, I think we cannot help seeing that there runs, as I said, throughout the whole of the Old Testament a singular strain of revelation in regard to a Person who, in a remarkable manner, is distinguished from the created hosts of angel beings, and also is distinguished from, and yet in name, attributes, and worship all but identified with, the Lord Himself.

If we turn to the narrative before us, we find there similar phenomena marked out. For this mysterious 'man with the sword drawn' in his hand, quotes the very words which were spoken at the bush, when he says, 'Loose thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy.' And by fair implication, He would have us to identify the persons in these two great theophanies. He ascribes to Himself, in the further conversation in the next chapter, directly divine attributes, and is named by the sacred name: 'The Lord said unto Joshua, see, I have given into thy hand Jericho and its king.'

If we turn to the New Testament, we find that there under another image the same strain of thought is presented. The Word of God, who from everlasting 'was with God, and was God,' is represented as being the Agent of Creation, the Source of all human illumination, the Director of Providence, the Lord of the Universe. 'By him were all things, and in him all things consists.' So, surely, these two halves make a whole; and the Angel of the Lord, separate and yet so strangely identified with Jehovah, who at the crises of the nation's history, and stages of the development of the process of Revelation, is manifested, and the Eternal Word of God, whom the New Testament reveals to us, are one and the same.

This truth was transiently manifested in our text. The vision passed, the ground that was hallowed by His foot is undistinguished now in the sweltering plain round the mound that once was Jericho. But the fact remains, the humanity, that was only in appearance, and for a few minutes, assumed then, has now been taken up into everlasting union with the divine nature, and a Man reigns on the Throne, and is Commander of all who battle for the truth and the right. The eternal order of the universe is before us here.

It only remains to say a word in reference to the sweep of the command which our vision assigns to the Angel of the Lord. 'Captain of the Lord's host' means a great deal more than the true General of Israel's little army. It does mean that, or the words and the vision would cease to have relevance and bearing on the moment's circumstances and need. But it includes also, as the usage of Scripture would sufficiently show if it were needful to adduce instances of it, all the ordered ranks of loftier intelligent beings, and all the powers and forces of the universe. These are conceived of as an embattled host, comparable to an army in the strictness of their discipline and their obedience to a single will. It is the modern thought that the universe is a Cosmos and not a Chaos, an ordered unit, with the addition of the truth beyond the reach and range of science, that its unity is the expression of a personal will. It is the same thought which the centurion had, to Christ's wonder, when he compared his own power as an officer in a legion, where his will was implicitly obeyed, to the power of Christ over diseases and sorrows and miseries and death, and recognised that all these were His servants, to whom, if His autocratic lips chose to say 'Go,' they went, and if He said, 'Do this,' they did it.

So the Lord of the universe and its ordered ranks is Jesus Christ. That is the truth which was flashed from the unknown, like a vanishing meteor in the midnight, before the face of Joshua, and which stands like the noonday sun, unsetting and irradiating for us who live under the Gospel.

II. I see here the Leader of all the warfare against the world's evil.

'The Captain of the Lord's host.' He Himself takes part in the fight. He is not like a general who, on some safe knoll behind the army, sends his soldiers to death, and keeps his own skin whole. But He *has* fought, and He *is* fighting. Do you remember that wonderful picture in two halves, at the end of one of the Gospels, 'the Lord went up into Heaven and sat at the right hand of God, . . . they went forth everywhere preaching the Word'? Strange contrast between the repose of the seated Christ and the toils of His peripatetic servants! Yes, strange contrast; but the next words harmonise the two halves of it; 'the Lord also working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.' The Leader does not so rest as that He does not fight; and the servants do not need so to fight, as that they cannot rest. Thus the old legends of many a land and tongue have a glorious truth in them to the eye of faith, and at the head of all the armies that are charging against any form of the world's misery and sin, there moves the form of the Son of Man, whose aid we have to invoke, even from His crowned repose at the right hand of God. 'Gird thy sword upon Thy thigh, O Most Mighty, and in Thy majesty ride forth prosperously, and Thy right hand shall teach Thee terrible things.'

If this, then, be for us, as truly as for Joshua and his host, a revelation of who is our true leader, surely all of us in our various degrees, and especially any of us who have any 'Quixotic crusade' for the world's good on our consciences and on our hands, may take the lessons and the encouragements that are here. Own your Leader; that is one plain duty. And recognise this fact, that by no other power than by His, and with no other weapons than those which He puts into our hands, in His Cross and meekness, can a world's evils be overcome, and the victory be won for the right and the truth. I have no faith in crusades which are not under the Captain of our salvation. And I would that the earnest men, and there are many of them, the laborious and the self-sacrificing men in many departments of philanthropy and benevolence and social reformation—who labour unaware of who is their Leader, and not dependent upon His help, nor trusting in His strength—would take to heart this vision of my text, and see beside them the 'man with the drawn sword in his hand,' the Christ with the 'sharp two-edged sword going out of his mouth,' by whom, and by whom alone, the world's evil can be overcome and slain.

Own your General; submit to His authority; pick the weapons that He can bless; trust absolutely in His help. We *may* have, we *shall* have, in all enterprises for God and man that are worth doing, 'need of patience,' just as the army of Israel had to parade for six weary days round Jericho blowing their useless trumpets, whilst the impregnable walls stood firm, and the defenders flouted and jeered their aimless procession. But the seventh day will come, and at the trumpet blast down will go the loftiest ramparts of the cities that are 'walled up to heaven,' with a rush and a crash, and through the dust and over the ruined rubbish Christ's soldiers will march and take possession. So trust in your Leader, and be sure of the victory, and have patience and keep on at your work.

Do not make Joshua's mistake. 'Art Thou for us?' —'Nay! Thou art for *me*.' That is a very different thing. We have the right to be sure that God is on our side, when we have made sure that we are on God's. So take care of self-will and self-regard, and human passions, and all the other parasitical insects that creep round philanthropic religious work, lest they spoil your service. There is a great deal that calls itself after Jehu's fashion, 'My zeal for the Lord,' which is nothing better than zeal for my own notions and their preponderance. Therefore we must strip ourselves of all that, and not fancy that the cause is ours, and then graciously admit Christ to help us, but recognise that it is *His*, and lowly submit ourselves to His direction, and what we do, do, and when we fight, fight, in His name and for His sake.

III. Here is the Ally in all our warfare with ourselves.

That is the worst fight. Far worse than all these Hittites and Hivites, and the other tribes with their barbarous names, far worse than all external foes, are the foes that each man carries about in his own heart. In that slow hand-to-hand and foot-to-foot struggle I do not believe that there is any conquering power available for a man that can for a moment be compared with the power that comes through submission to Christ's command and acceptance of Christ's help He has fought every foot of the ground before us. We have to 'run the race'—to take another metaphor—'that is set before us, looking unto Jesus,' the great Leader, and in His own self the Perfecter of the faith which conquers. In Him, His example, the actual communication of His divine Spirit, and in the motives for brave and persistent conflict which flow from His Cross and Passion, we shall find that which alone will make us the victors in this internecine warfare. There can be no better directory given to any man than to tread in Christ's footsteps, and learn how to fight, from Him who in the wilderness repelled the triple assault with the single 'It is written'; thus recognising the word and will of God as the only directory and defence.

Thus, brethren, if we humbly take service in His ranks, and ask Him to show us where our foes within are, and to give us the grace to grapple with them, and cast them out, anything is possible rather than ultimate defeat, and however long and sore the struggle may be, its length and its severity are precious parts of the discipline that makes us strong, and we shall at last be more than conquerors through Him that loveth us.

IV. Lastly, I see here the Power which it is madness to resist.

Think of this vision. Think of the deep truths, partially shadowed and symbolised by it. Think of Christ, what He is, and what resources He has at His back, of what are His claims for our service, and our loyal, militant obedience. Think of the certain victory of all who follow Him amongst 'the armies of Heaven, clad in fine linen, clean and white.' Think of the crown and the throne for him that 'overcomes.'

Remember the destructive powers that sleep in Him: the 'drawn sword in His hand,' the 'two-edged sword out of His mouth,' the 'wrath of the Lamb.' Think of the ultimate certain defeat of all antagonisms; of that last campaign when He goes forth with the 'name written on His vesture and on His thigh "King of kings and Lord of lords."' Think of how He 'strikes through kings in the day of His wrath, and fills the place with the bodies of the dead'; and how His 'enemies become His footstool.'

Ponder His own solemn word, 'He that is not with Me, is against Me.' There is no neutrality in this warfare. Either we are for Him or we are for His adversary. 'Under which King? speak or die!' As sensible men, not indifferent to your highest and lasting wellbeing, ask yourselves, 'Can I, with my ten thousand, meet Him with His twenty thousand?' Put yourselves under His orders, and He will be on your side. He will teach your hands to war, and your fingers to fight; will cover your heads in the day of battle, and bring you at last, palm-bearing and laurel-crowned, to that blissful state where there will still be service, and He still be the 'Captain of the Lord's host,' but where 'swords will be beaten into ploughshares' and the victors shall need to 'learn war no more.'

THE SIEGE OF JERICHO

'And Joshua had commanded the people, saying, Ye shall not shout, nor make any noise with your voice, . . . until the day I bid you shout; then shall ye shout. 11. So the ark of the Lord compassed the city, going about it once: and they came into the camp, and lodged in the camp.'—JOSHUA vi. 10, 11.

THE cheerful uniform obedience of Israel to Joshua stands in very remarkable contrast with their perpetual murmurings and rebellions under Moses. Many reasons probably concurred in bringing about this change of tone. For one thing the long period of suspense was over; and to average sense-bound people there is no greater trial of faith and submission than waiting, inactive, for something that is to come. Now they are face to face with their enemies, and it is a great deal easier to fight than to expect; and their courage mounts higher as dangers come nearer. Then there were great miracles which left their impression upon the people, such as the passage of the Jordan, and so on.

So that the Epistle to the Hebrews is right when it says, 'By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were compassed about seven days.' And that faith was as manifest in the six days' march round the city, as on the seventh day of victorious entrance. For, if you will read the narrative carefully, you will see that it says that the Israelites were not told what was to be the end of that apparently useless and aimless promenade. It was only on the morning of the day of the miracle that it was announced. So there are two stages in this instance of faith. There is the protracted trial of it, in doing an apparently useless thing; and there is the victory, which explains and vindicates it. Let us look at these two points now.

I. Consider that strange protracted trial of faith.

The command comes to the people, through Joshua's lips, unaccompanied by any explanation or reasons. If Moses had called for a like obedience from the people in their wilderness mood, there would have been no end of grumbling. But whatever some of them may have thought, there is nothing recorded now but prompt submission. Notice, too, the order of the procession. First come the armed men, then seven white-robed priests, blowing, probably, discordant music upon their ram's horn trumpets; then the Ark, the symbol and token of God's presence; and then the rereward. So the *Ark* is the centre; and it is not only Israel that is marching round the city, but rather it is God who is circling the walls. Very impressive would be the grim silence of it all. Tramp, tramp, tramp, round and round, six days on end, without a word spoken (though no doubt taunts in plenty were being showered down from the walls), they marched, and went back to the camp, and subsided into inactivity for another four-and-twenty hours, until they 'turned out' for the procession once more.

Now, what did all that mean? The blast of the trumpet was, in the Jewish feasts, the solemn proclamation of the presence of God. And hence the purpose of that singular march circumambulating Jericho was to declare 'Here is the Lord of the whole earth, weaving His invisible cordon and network around the doomed city.' In fact the meaning of the procession, emphasised by the silence of the soldiers, was that

God Himself was saying, in the long-drawn blasts of the priestly trumpet, 'Lift up your heads, O ye gates! even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in.' Now, whatever Jericho and its people thought about that, Israel, according to the commentary of the New Testament, had to some extent, at all events, learnt the lesson, and knew, of course very rudimentarily and with a great deal of mere human passion mingled with it, but still knew, that this was God's summons, and the manifestation of God's presence. And so round the city they went, and day by day they did the thing in which their faith apprehended its true meaning, and which, by reason of their faith, they were willing to do. Let us take some lessons from that.

Here is a confidence in the divine presence, manifested by unquestioning obedience to a divine command.

'Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why.'

Joshua had spoken; God had spoken through him. And so here goes! up with the Ark and the trumpets, and out on to the hot sand for the march! It would have been a great deal easier to have stopped in the tents. It was disheartening work marching round thus. The sceptical spirit in the host—the folk of whom there are many great-grandchildren living to-day, who always have objections to urge when disagreeable duties are crammed up against their faces—would have enough to say on that occasion, but the bulk of the people were true, and obeyed. Now, we do not need to put out the eyes of our understanding in order to practise the obedience of faith. And we have to exercise common-sense about the things that seem to us to be duties.

But this is plain, that if once we see a thing to be, in Christian language, the will of our Father in heaven, then everything is settled; and there is only one course for us, and that is, unquestioning submission, active submission, or, what is as hard, passive submission.

Then here again is faith manifesting itself by an obedience which was altogether ignorant of what was coming. I think that is quite plain in the story, if you will read it carefully, though I think that it is not quite what people generally understand as its meaning. But it makes the incident more in accordance with God's uniform way of dealing with us that the host should be told on the morning of the first day of the week that they were to march round the city, and told the same on the second day, and on the third the same, and so on until the sixth; and that not until the morning of the seventh, were they told what was to be the end of it all. That is the way in which God generally deals with us. In the passage of the Jordan, too, you will find, if you will look at the narrative carefully, that although Joshua was told what was coming, the people were not told till the morning of the day, when the priests' feet were dipped in the brink of the water. We, too, have to do our day's march, knowing very little about to-morrow; and we have to carry on all through life 'doing the duty that lies nearest us,' entirely ignorant of the strange issues to which it may conduct. Life is like a voyage down some winding stream, shut in by hills, sometimes sunny and vine-clad, like the Rhine, sometimes grim and black, like an American cañon. As the traveller looks ahead he wonders how the stream will find a passage beyond the next bend; and as he looks back, he cannot trace the course by which he has come. It is only when he rounds the last shoulder that he sees a narrow opening flashing in the sunshine, and making a way for his keel. So, seeing that we know nothing about the issues, let us make sure of the motives; and seeing that we do not know what to-morrow may bring forth, nor even what the next moment may bring, let us see that we fill the present instant as full as it will hold with active obedience to God, based upon simple faith in Him. He does not open His whole hand at once; He opens a finger at a time, as you do sometimes with your children when you are trying to coax them to take something out of the palm. He gives us enough light for the moment. He says, 'March round Jericho; and be sure that I mean something. What I do mean I will tell you some day.' And so we have to put all into His hands.

Then here, again, is faith manifesting itself by persistency. A week was not long, but it was a long while during which to do that one apparently useless thing and nothing else. It would take about an hour or so to march round the city, and there were twenty-three hours of idleness. Little progress in reducing Jericho was made by the progress round it, and it must have got rather wearisome about the sixth day. Familiarity would breed monotony, but notwithstanding the deadly influences of habit, the obedient host turned out for their daily round. 'Let us not be weary in well-doing,' for there is a time for everything. There is a time for sowing and for reaping, and in the season of the reaping 'we shall reap, if we faint not.' Dear brethren! we all get weary of our work. Custom presses upon us, 'with a weight heavy as frost, and deep almost as life.' It is easy to do things with a spurt, but it is the keeping on at the monotonous, trivial, and sometimes unintelligible duties that is the test of a man's grit, and of his goodness too. So, although it is a very, very threadbare lesson—one that you may think it was not worth while for me to bring you all here to receive—I am sure that there are few things needed more by us all, and especially by those of us who are on the wrong side of middle life, as people call it—though I think it is the right side in many respects—than that old familiar lesson. Keep on as you have begun, and for the six weary days turn out, however hot the sun, however comfortable the carpets in the tent, however burning the sand, however wearisome and flat it may seem to be perpetually tramping round the same walls of the same old city; keep on, for in due season the trumpet will sound and the walls will fall.

II. So that brings me to the second stage—viz., the sudden victory which vindicates and explains the protracted trial of faith.

I do not need to tell the story of how, on the seventh day, the host encompassed the city seven times, and at last they were allowed to break the long silence with a shout. You will observe the prominence given to the sacred seven, both in the number of days, of circuits made, and the number of the priests' trumpets. Probably the last day was a Sabbath, for there must have been one somewhere in the week, and it is improbable that it was one of the undistinguished days. That *was* a shout, we may be sure, by which the week's silence was avenged, and all the repressed emotions gained utterance at last. The fierce yell from many throats, which startled the wild creatures in the hills behind Jericho, blended discordantly with the trumpets' clang which proclaimed a present God; and at His summons the fortifications toppled into hideous ruin, and over the fallen stones the men of Israel clambered, each soldier, in all that terrible circle of avengers that surrounded the doomed city, marching straight forward, and so all converging on the centre.

Now, we can discover good reasons for this first incident in the campaign being marked by miracle. The fact that it was the first is a reason. It is a law of God's progressive revelation that each new epoch is inaugurated by miraculous works which do not continue throughout its course. For instance, it is observable that, in the *Acts of the Apostles*, the first example of each class of incidents recorded there, such as the first preaching, the first persecution, the first martyrdom, the first expansion of the Gospel beyond Jews, its first entrance into Europe, has usually the stamp of miracle impressed on it, and is narrated at great length, while subsequent events of the same class have neither of these marks of distinction. Take, for example, the account of Stephen, the first martyr. He saw 'the heavens opened' and the Son of Man 'standing at the right hand of God.' We do not read that the heavens opened when Herod struck off the head of James with the sword. But was Jesus any the less near to help His servant? Certainly not.

In like manner it was fitting that the first time that Israel crossed swords with these deadly and dreaded enemies should be marked by a miraculous intervention to hearten God's warriors. But let us take care that we understand the teaching of any miracle. Surely it does not secularise and degrade the other incidents of a similar sort in which no miracle was experienced. The very opposite lesson is the true one to draw from a miracle. In its form it is extraordinary, and presents God's direct action on men or on nature. so obviously that all eyes can see it. But the conclusion to be drawn is not that God acts only in a 'supernatural' manner, but that He is acting as really, though in a less obvious fashion, in the 'natural' order. In these turning-points, the inauguration of new stages in revelation or history, the cause which always produces all nearer effects and the ultimate effects, which are usually separated or united (as one may choose to regard it) by many intervening links, are brought together. But the originating power works as truly when it is transmitted through these many links as when it dispenses with them. Miracle shows us in abbreviated fashion, and therefore conspicuously, the divine will acting directly, that we may see it working when it acts indirectly. In miracle God 'makes bare His arm,' that we may be sure of its operation when it is draped and partially hid, as by a vesture, by second causes.

We are not to argue that, because there is no miracle, God is not present or active. He was as truly with Israel when there was no Ark present, and no blast of the trumpet heard. He was as truly with Israel when they fought apparently unhelped, as He was when Jericho fell. The teaching of all the miracles in the Old and the New Testaments is that the order of the universe is maintained by the continual action of the will of God on men and things. So this story is a transient revelation of an eternal fact. God is as much with you and me in our fights as He was with the Israelites when they marched round Jericho, and as certainly will He help. If by faith we endure the days of often blind obedience, we shall share the rapture of the sudden victory.

Now, I have said that the last day of this incident was probably a Sabbath day. Does not that suggest the thought that we may take this story as a prophetic symbol? There is for us a week of work, and a seventh day of victory, when we shall enter, not into the city of confusion which has come to nought, but into the city which 'hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God.' The old fathers of the Christian Church were not far wrong, when they saw in this story a type of the final coming of the Lord. Did you ever notice how St. Paul, in writing to the Thessalonians about that coming, seems to have his mind turned back to the incident before us? Remember that in this incident the two things which signalised the fall of the city were the trumpet and the shout. What does Paul say? 'The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a *shout*, with the voice of the archangel, and with the *trump* of God.' Jericho over again! And then, 'Babylon is fallen, is fallen!' 'And I saw the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, like a bride adorned for her husband.'

RAHAB

'And Joshua saved Rahab the harlot alive . . . and she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day.'—JOSHUA vi. 25.

THIS story comes in like an oasis in these terrible narratives of Canaanite extermination. There is much about it that is beautiful and striking, but the main thing is that it teaches the universality of God's mercy, and the great truth that trust in Him unites to Him and brings deliverance, how black soever may have been the previous life.

I need not tell over again the story, told with such inimitable picturesqueness here: how the two spies, swimming the Jordan in flood, set out on their dangerous mission and found themselves in the house of Rahab, a harlot; how the king sent to capture them, how she hid them among the flax-stalks bleaching on the flat roof, confessed faith in Israel's God and lied steadfastly to save them, how they escaped to the Quarantania hills, how she 'perished not' in the capture, entered into the community of Israel, was married, and took her place—hers!—in the line of David's and Christ's ancestresses.

The point of interest is her being, notwithstanding her previous position and history, one of the few instances in which heathen were brought into Israel. The *Epistle to the Hebrews* and *James* both refer to her. We now consider her story as embodying for us some important truths about faith in its nature, its origin, its power.

I. Faith in its constant essence and its varying objects.

Her creed was very short and simple. She abjured idols, and believed that Jehovah was the one God. She knew nothing of even the Mosaic revelation, nothing of its moral law or of its sacrifices. And yet the *Epistle to the Hebrews* has no scruple in ascribing faith to her. The object of that Epistle is to show that Christianity is Judaism perfected. It labours to establish that objectively there has been advance, not contradiction, and that subjectively there is absolute identity. It has always been faith that has bound men to God. That faith may co-exist with very different degrees of illumination. Not the creed, but the trust, is the all-important matter. This applies to all pre-Christian times and to all heathen lands. *Our* faith has a fuller gospel to lay hold of. Do not neglect it.

Beware lest people with less light and more love get in before you, 'who shall come from the east and the west.'

II. Faith in its origin in fear.

There are many roads to faith, and it matters little which we take, so long as we get to the goal. This is one, and some people seem to think that it is a very low and unworthy one, and one which we should never urge upon men. But there are a side of the divine nature and a mode of the divine government which properly evoke fear.

God's moral government, His justice and retribution, are facts.

Fear is an inevitable and natural consequence of feeling that His justice is antagonistic to us. The work of conscience is precisely to create such fear. Not to feel it is to fall below manhood or to be hardened by sin.

That fear is meant to lead us to God and love. Rahab fled to God. Peter 'girt his fisher's coat to him,' and lost his fear in the sunshine of Christ's face, as a rainbow trembles out of a thunder-cloud when touched by sunbeams.

We have all grounds enough to *fear*.

Urge these as a reason for *trust*.

III. Faith in its relation to the previous life.

It is a strange instance of blindness that attempts have been made to soften down the Bible's plain speaking about Rahab's character.

In her story we have an anticipation of New Testament teaching.

The 'woman that was a sinner.'

Mary Magdalene.

'Then drew near all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him.'

She shows us that there is no hopeless guilt. None is so in regard to the effects of sin on a soul. There is no heart so indurated as that its capacity for being stirred by the divine message is killed.

There is none hopeless in regard to God.

His love embraces all, however bad. The bond which unites to Him is not blamelessness of life but simple trust.

The grossest vice is not so thorough a barrier as self-satisfied self-righteousness.

A thin slice of crystal will bar the entrance of air more effectually than many folds of stuff.

IV. Faith in its practical effects.

Rahab's story shows how living faith, like a living stream, will cut a channel for itself, and must needs flow out into the life.

Hence James is right in using her as an example of how 'we are justified by works and not by faith only,' and the author of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* is equally right in enrolling her in his great muster-roll of heroes and heroines of faith, and asserting that 'by faith' she 'perished not among them who believed not.' The one writer fastens on a later stage in her experience than does the other. James points to the rich fruit, the Epistle to the Hebrews goes deeper and lays bare the root from which the life rose to the clusters.

The faith that saves is not a barren intellectual process, nor an idle trust in Christ's salvation, but a practical power. If genuine it *will* mould and impel the life.

So Rahab's faith led her, as ours, if real, will lead us, to break with old habits and associations contrary to itself. She ceased to be 'Rahab the harlot,' she forsook 'her own people and her father's house.' But her conquest of her old self was gradual. A lie was a strange kind of first-fruits of faith. Its true fruit takes time to flower and swell and come to ripeness and sweetness.

So we should not expect old heads on young shoulders, nor wonder if people, lifted from the dunghills of the world, have some stench and rags of their old vices hanging about them still That thought should moderate our expectations of the characters of converts from heathenism, or from the degraded classes at home. And it should be present to ourselves, when we find in ourselves sad recurrences of faults and sins that we know should have been cast out, and that we hoped had been so.

This thought enhances our wondering gratitude for the divine long-suffering which bears with our slow progress. Our great Teacher never loses patience with His dull scholars.

V. Faith as the means of deliverance and safety.

From external evils it delivers us or not, as God may will. James was no less dear, and no less faithful, than John, though he was early 'slain with the sword,' and his brother died in extreme old age in Ephesus. Paul looked forward to being 'delivered from every evil work,' though he knew that the time of his being 'offered' was at hand, because the deliverance that he looked for was his being 'saved *into* His heavenly kingdom.'

That true deliverance is infallibly ours, if by faith we have made the Deliverer ours.

There is a more terrible fall of a worse city than Jericho, in that day when 'the city of the terrible ones shall be laid low,' and *our* Joshua brings it 'to the ground, even to the dust.' 'In that same day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah: we have a strong city, salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.'

and into that eternal home He will certainly lead all who are joined to Him, and separated from their foul old selves, and from 'the city of destruction,' by faith in Him.

ACHAN'S SIN, ISRAEL'S DEFEAT

'But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against the children of Israel. 2. And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Beth-aven, on the east side of Beth-el, and spake unto them, saying, Go up and view the country. And the men went up and viewed Ai. 3. And they returned to Joshua, and said unto him, Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand men go up and smite Ai; and make not all the people to labour thither; for they are but few. 4. So there went up thither of the people about three thousand men: and they fled before the men of Ai. 5. And the men of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them from before the gate even unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down; wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water. 6. And Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the Lord until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and put dust upon their heads. 7. And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord God, wherefore hast Thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan! 8. O Lord, what shall I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies! 9. For the Canaanites, and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt Thou do unto Thy great name? 10. And the Lord said unto Joshua, Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? 11. Israel hath sinned, and they have also trangressed My covenant which I commanded them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own stuff. 12. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because they were accursed; neither will I be with you any more, except ye destroy the accursed from among you.'—JOSHUA vii. 1-12.

THIS passage naturally parts itself into—1. The hidden sin (v. 1); 2. The repulse by which it is punished (vs. 2-5); 3. The prayer of remonstrance (vs. 6-9); and 4. The answer revealing the cause (vs. 10-12). We may briefly note the salient points in these four divisions, and then consider the general lessons of the whole.

I. Observe, then, that the sin is laid at the doors of the whole nation, while yet it was the secret act of one man. That is a strange 'for' in verse 1—the people did it; 'for' Achan did it. Observe, too, with what bitter particularity his descent is counted back through three generations, as if to diffuse the shame and guilt over a wide area, and to blacken the ancestors of the culprit. Note also the description of the sin. Its details are not given, but its inmost nature is. The specification of the 'Babylonish garment,' the 'shekels of silver,' and the 'wedge of gold,' is reserved for the sinner's own confession; but the blackness of the deed is set forth in its principle in verse 1. It was a 'breach of trust,' for so the phrase 'committed a trespass' might be rendered. The expression is frequent in the Pentateuch to describe Israel's treacherous departure from God, and has this full meaning here. The sphere in which Achan's treason was evidenced was 'in the devoted thing.' The spoil of Jericho was set aside for Jehovah, and to appropriate any part of it was sacrilege. His sin, then, was double, being at once covetousness and robbing God. Achan, at the beginning of Israel's warfare for Canaan, and Ananias, at the beginning of the Church's conquest of the world, are brothers alike in guilt and in doom. Note the wide sweep of 'the anger of the Lord,' involving in its range not only the one transgressor, but the whole people.

II. All unconscious of the sin, and flushed with victory, Joshua let no grass grow under his feet, but was prepared to push his advantage to the utmost with soldierly promptitude. The commander's faith and courage were contagious, and the spies came back from their perilous reconnaissance of Ai with the advice that a small detachment was enough for its reduction. They had not spied the mound in the middle of Achan's tent, or their note would have been changed. Three thousand, or three hundred, would have been enough, if God had been with them. The whole army would not have been enough since He was not. The site of Ai seems to have been satisfactorily identified on a small plateau among the intricate network of wild wadys and bare hills that rise behind Jericho. The valley to the north, the place where the ambush lay at the successful assault, and a great mound, still bearing the name 'Et Tel' (the heap), are all there. The attacking force does not seem to have been commanded by Joshua. The ark stayed at Gilgal. The contempt for the resistance likely to be met makes the panic which ensued the more remarkable. What turned the hearts of the confident assailants to water? There was no serious fighting, or the slaughter would have been more than thirty-six. 'There went up . . . about three thousand and they'—did what? fought and conquered? Alas, no, but 'they fled before the men of Ai,' rushing in wild terror down the steep pass which they had so confidently breasted in the morning, till the pursuers caught them up at some 'quarries,' where, perhaps, the ground was difficult, and there slew the few who fell, while the remainder got away by swiftness of foot, and brought back their terror and their shame to the camp. As the disordered fugitives poured in, they infected the whole with their panic. Such unwieldy undisciplined hosts are peculiarly liable to such contagious terror, and we find many instances in Scripture and elsewhere of the utter disorganisation which ensues. The whole conquest hung in the balance. A little more and the army would be a mob; and the mob would break into twos and threes, which would get short shrift from the Amorites.

III. Mark, then, Joshua's action in the crisis. He does not try to encourage the people, but turns from them to God. The spectacle of the leader and the elders prone before the ark, with rent garments and dust-bestrewn hair, in sign of mourning, would not be likely to hearten the alarmed people; but the defeat had clearly shown that something had disturbed the relation to God, and the first necessity was to know what it was. Joshua's prayer is perplexed, and not free from a wistful, backward look, nor from regard to his own reputation; but the soul of it is an earnest desire to know the 'wherefore' of this disaster. It traces the defeat to God, and means really, 'Show me wherefore Thou contendest with me.' No doubt it runs perilously near to repeating the old complaints at Kadesh and elsewhere, which are almost verbally reproduced in its first words. But the same things said by different people are not the same; and Joshua's question is the voice of a faith struggling to find footing, and his backward look is not because he doubts God's power to help, or hankers after Egypt, but because he sees that, for some unknown reason, they have lost the divine protection. His reference to himself betrays the crushing weight of responsibility which he felt, and comes not from carefulness for his own good fame so much as from his dread of being unable to vindicate himself, if the people should turn on him as the author of their misfortunes. His fear of the news of the check at Ai emboldening not only the neighbouring Amorites (highlanders) of the western Palestine, but the remoter Canaanites (lowlanders) of the coast, to make a combined attack, and sweep Israel out of existence, was a perfectly reasonable forecast of what would follow. The naïve simplicity of the appeal to God, 'What wilt

Thou do for Thy great name?' becomes the soldier, whose words went the shortest way to their aim, as his spear did. We cannot fancy this prayer coming from Moses; but, for all that, it has the ring of faith in it, and beneath its blunt, simple words throbs a true heart.

IV. The answer sounds strange at first. God almost rebukes him for praying. He gives Joshua back his own 'wherefore' in the question that sounds so harsh, 'Wherefore art thou thus fallen upon thy face?' but the harshness is only apparent, and serves to point the lesson that follows, that the cause of the disaster is with Israel, not with God, and that therefore the remedy is not in prayer, but in active steps to cast out 'the unclean thing.' The prayer had asked two things,—the disclosure of the cause of God's having left them, and His return. The answer lays bare the cause, and therein shows the conditions of His return. Note the indignant accumulation of verbs in verse 11, describing the sin in all its aspects. The first three of the six point out its heinousness in reference to God, as sin, as a breach of covenant, and as an appropriation of what was specially His. The second three describe it in terms of ordinary morality, as theft, lying, and concealment; so many black sides has one sin when God's eye scrutinises it. Note, too, the attribution of the sin to the whole people, the emphatic reduplication of the shameful picture of their defeat, the singular transference to them of the properties of 'the devoted thing' which Achan has taken, and the plain, stringent conditions of God's return. Joshua's prayer is answered. He knows now why little Ai has beaten them back. He asked, 'What shall I say?' He has got something of grave import to say. So far this passage carries us.

leaving the pitiful last hour of the wretched troubler of Israel untouched. What lessons are taught here?

First, God's soldiers must be pure. The conditions of God's help are the same to-day as when that panic-stricken crowd ignominiously fled down the rocky pass, foiled before an insignificant fortress, because sin clave to them, and God was gone from them. The age of miracles may have ceased, but the law of the divine intervention which governed the miracles has not ceased. It is true to-day, and will always be true, that the victories of the Church are won by its holiness far more than by any gifts or powers of mind, culture, wealth, eloquence, or the like. Its conquests are the conquests of an indwelling God, and He cannot share His temples with idols. When God is with us, Jericho is not too strong to be captured; when He is driven from us by our own sin, Ai is not too weak to defeat us. A shattered wall keeps us out, if we fight in our own strength. Fortifications that reach to heaven fall flat before us when God is at our side. If Christian effort seems ever fruitless, the first thing to do is to look for the 'Babylonish garment' and the glittering shekels hidden in our tents. Nine times out of ten we shall find the cause in our own spiritual deficiencies. Our success depends on God's presence, and God's presence depends on our keeping His dwelling-place holy. When the Church is 'fair as the moon,' reflecting in silvery whiteness the ardours of the sun which gives her all her light, and without such spots as dim the moon's brightness, she will be 'terrible as an army with banners.' This page of Old Testament history has a living application to the many efforts and few victories of the churches of to-day, which seem scarce able to hold their own amid the natural increase of population in so-called Christian lands, and are so often apparently repulsed when they go up to attack the outlying heathenism.

> 'His strength was as the strength of ten,
> Because his heart was pure,'

is true of the Christian soldier.

Again, we learn the power of one man to infect a whole community and to inflict disaster on it. One sick sheep taints a flock. The effects of the individual's sin are not confined to the doer. We have got a fine new modern word to express this solemn law, and we talk now of 'solidarity,' which sounds very learned and 'advanced.' But it means just what we see in this story; Achan was the sinner, all Israel suffered. We are knit together by a mystical but real bond, so that 'no man,' be he good or bad, 'liveth to himself,' and no man's sin terminates in himself. We see the working of that unity in families, communities, churches, nations. Men are not merely aggregated together like a pile of cannon balls, but are knit together like the myriad lives in a coral rock. Put a drop of poison anywhere, and it runs by a thousand branching veins through the mass, and tints and taints it all. No man can tell how far the blight of his secret sins may reach, nor how wide the blessing of his modest goodness may extend. We should seek to cultivate the sense of being members of a great whole, and to ponder our individual responsibility for the moral and religious health of the church, the city, the nation. We are not without danger from an exaggerated individualism, and we need to realise more constantly and strongly that we are but threads in a great network, endowed with mysterious vitality and power of transmitting electric impulses, both of good and evil.

Again, we have one more illustration in this story of the well-worn lesson,—never too threadbare to be repeated, until it is habitually realised,—that God's eye sees the hidden sins. Nobody saw Achan carry the spoil to his tent, or dig the hole to hide it. His friends walked across the floor without suspicion of what was beneath. No doubt, he held his place in his tribe as an honourable man, and his conscience traced no connection between that recently disturbed patch on the floor and the helter-skelter flight from Ai; but when the lot began to be cast, he would have his own thought, and when the tribe of Judah was taken, some creeping fear would begin to coil round his heart, which tightened its folds, and hissed more loudly, as each step in the lot brought discovery nearer home; and when, at last, his own name fell from the vase, how terribly the thought would glare in on him,—'And God knew it all the while, and I fancied I had covered it all up so safely.' It is an awful thing to hear the bloodhounds following up the scent which leads them straight to our lurking-place. God's judgments may be long in being put on our tracks, but, once loose, they are sure of scent, and cannot be baffled. It is an old, old thought, 'Thou God seest me'; but kept well in mind, it would save from many a sin, and make sunshine in many a shady place.

Again, we have in Achan a lesson which the professing Christians of great commercial nations, like England, sorely need. I have already pointed out the singular parallel between him and Ananias and Sapphira. Covetousness was the sin of all three. It is the sin of the Church to-day. The whole atmosphere in which some of us live is charged with the subtle poison of it. Men are estimated by their wealth. The great aim of life is to get money, or to keep it, or to gain influence and notoriety by spending it. Did anybody ever hear of church discipline being exercised on men who committed Achan's sin? *He* was stoned to death, but we set *our* Achans in high places in the Church. Perhaps if we went and fell on our faces before the ark when we are beaten, we should be directed to some tent where a very 'influential member' of Israel lived, and should find that to put an end to his ecclesiastical life had a wonderful effect in bringing back courage to the army, and leading to more unmingled dependence on God. Covetousness was stoned to death in Israel, and struck with sudden destruction in the Apostolic Church. It has been reserved for the modern Church to tolerate and almost to canonise it; and yet we wonder how it comes that we are so often foiled before some little Ai, and so seldom see any walls falling by our assault. Let us listen to that stern sentence, 'I will not be with you any more, except ye destroy the devoted thing from among you.'

THE SUN STAYED

'Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon.'—JOSHUA x. 12.

'THE last time,' what a sad sound that has! In all minds there is a shrinking from the last time of doing even some common act. The walk down a street that we have passed every day for twenty years, and never cared in the least about, and the very doorsteps and the children in the streets, have an interest for us, as pensively we leave the commonplace familiar scene.

On this last Sunday of another year, there comes a tone of sober meditation over us, as we think that it *is* the last. I would fain let the hour preach. I have little to say but to give voice to its lessons.

My text is only taken as a starting-point, and I shall say nothing about Joshua and his prayer. I do not discuss whether this was a miracle or not. It seems, at any rate, to be taken by the writer of the story as one. What a picture he draws of the fugitives rushing down the rocky pass, blind in their fear, behind them the flushed and eager conqueror, the burst of the sudden tempest and far in the west the crescent moon, the leader on the hilltop with his prayer for but one hour or two more of daylight to finish the wild work so well begun! And, says the story, his wish was granted, and no day has been 'like it before or since, in which the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man.' Once, and only once, did time seem to stand still; from the beginning till now it has been going steadily on, and even then it only seemed to stand. That day seemed longer, but life was passing all the same.

And so the first thought forced upon us here by our narrative and by the season is the old one, so commonplace and yet so solemn.

I. Life inexorably slides away from us.

Once, and only once, it seemed to pause. How often since has Joshua's prayer been prayed again! By the fearful,—the wretch to be hanged at eight o'clock to-morrow morning, the man whom the next train will part from all he loves. By the hopeful,—the child wearying for the holidays, the bridegroom,

> 'Gallop apace, ye fiery-footed steeds!'

By the suffering,—

> 'Would God it were evening!'

By the martyr amid the flames,

'Come quickly, Lord Jesus!'

But all in vain. We cannot expand the moments to hours, nor compress the hours to moments. Leaden or winged, the hours are hours. The cold-blooded pendulum ticks on, equable and unaltered, and after sixty minutes, no sooner and no later, the hour strikes. 'There is a time for every purpose.'

How solemn is the thought of that constant process! It goes on for ever, like the sea fog creeping up from the wide ocean and burying life and sunshine in its fatal folds, or like the ever-flowing river, or like the fall plunging over the edge of the cliff, or like the motions of the midnight sky. Each moment in its turn passes into the colourless stony past, and the shadow creeps up the hillside.

And how unnoticed it is! We only know motion by the jolts. The revolution of the earth and its rush along its orbit are unfelt by us. We are constantly startled to feel how long ago such and such a thing took place. The mother sees her little girl at her knee, and in a few days, as it seems, finds her a woman. How immense is our life in the prospect, how awfully it collapses in the retrospect! Only by seeing constellation after constellation set, do we know that the heavens are in motion. We have need of an effort of serious reflection to realise that it is of *us* and of *our* lives that all these old commonplaces are true.

That constant, unnoticed progress has an end. Our life is a definite period, having a bounded past behind it, a present, and a bounded future before it. We have a sandglass and it runs out. We are like men sliding down a rope or hauling a boat towards a fixed point. The sea is washing away our sandy island, and is creeping nearer and nearer to where we stand, and will wash over us soon. No cries, nor prayers, nor wishes will avail. It is vain for *us* to say, 'Sun! stand thou still!'

II. Therefore our chief care should be to finish our work in our day.

Joshua had his day lengthened; we can come to the same result by crowding ours with service. What is the purpose of life? Is it a shop? or a garden? a school? No. Our 'chief end' is to become like God and a little to help forward His cause. All is intended to develop character; all life is disciplinary.

God's purpose should be our desire. That desire should mould all our thoughts and acts. There should be no mere sentimental regrets for the past, but the spirit of consecration should affect our thoughts about it. There should be penitence, thankfulness, not vain mourning over what is gone. There should be no waste or selfish use of the present. What is it given us for but to use for God?

Strenuous work is the true way to lengthen each day. Time is infinitely elastic. The noblest work is to do 'the works of Him that sent me.' There should be no care for the future. It is in His hand. There will be room in it for doing all His will.

> 'Lord, it belongs not to my care,
> Whether I die or live.'

III. If so, the passing day will have results that never pass.

Joshua's day was long enough for his work, and that work was a victory which told on future generations.

So life, short as it is, will be long enough for all that we have to do and learn and be.

Christ's servant is immortal till his work is done.

God gives every man time enough for his salvation.

What may we bring out of life? Character, Christlikeness, thankful memories, union with God, capacity for heaven. The transient leaves the abiding. The flood foams itself away, but deposits rich soil on the plain.

IV. Thus the passing away of what must pass may become a joy.

Why should we be sad? There are reasons enough, as many sad, lonely hearts among us know too well. To some men dark thoughts of death and judgment make the crumbling away of life too gloomy a fact to be contemplated, but it may and should be calm joy to us that the weary world ends and a blessed life begins. We may count the moments and see them pass, as a bride watches the hours rolling on to her marriage morning; not, indeed, without tremor and sadness at leaving her old home, but yet with meek hope and gentle joy.

It is possible for men to see that life is but 'as a shadow that declineth,' and yet to be glad. By faith in Christ, united to 'Him Who is for ever and ever,' our souls shall 'triumph over death and thee, O time.'

We need not cry, 'Sun! stand still!' but rather, 'Come quickly, Lord Jesus!'

Then Time shall be 'the lackey to eternity,' and Death be the porter of heaven's gate, and we shall pass from the land of setting suns and waning moons and change and sorrow, to that land where 'thy sun shall no more go down,' and 'there shall be no more time.'

UNWON BUT CLAIMED

'There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed, . . . them will I drive out from before the children of Israel; only divide thou it by lot unto Israel for an inheritance.'—JOSHUA xiii. 1-6.

JOSHUA was now a very old man and had occupied seven years in the conquest. His work was over, and now he had only to take steps to secure the completion by others of the triumph which he would never see. This incident has many applications to the work of the Church in the world, but not less important ones to individual progress, and we consider these mainly now.

I. The clear recognition of present imperfection.

That is essential in all regions. 'Not as though'; the higher up, the more clearly we see the summit. The ideal grows loftier, as partially realised. The mountain seems comparatively low and easy till we begin to climb. We should be continually driven by a sense of our incompleteness, and drawn by the fair vision of unattained possibilities. In all regions, to be satisfied with the attained is to cease to grow.

This is eminently so in the Christian life, with its goal of absolute completeness.

How blessed this dissatisfaction is! It keeps life fresh: it is the secret of perpetual youth.

Joshua's work was incomplete, as every man's must be. We each have our limitations, the defects of our qualities, the barriers of our environment, the brevity of our day of toil, and we have to be content to carry the fiery cross a little way and then to give it up to other hands. There is only One who could say, 'It is done.' Let us see that we do our own fragment.

II. The confident reckoning on complete possession.

Joshua's conquest was very partial. He subdued part of the central mountain nucleus, but the low-lying stretch of country on the coast, Philistia and the maritime plain up to Tyre and Sidon and other outlying districts, remained unsubdued. Yet the whole land was now to be allotted out to the tribes. That allotment must have strengthened faith in their ultimate possession, and encouraged effort to make the ideal a reality, and to appropriate as their own in fact what was already theirs in God's purpose. So a great part of Christian duty, and a great secret of Christian progress, is to familiarise ourselves with the hope of complete victory. We should acquire the habit of contemplating as certainly meant by God to be ours, complete conformity to Christ's character, complete appropriation of Christ's gifts. God bade Jeremiah buy a 'field that was in Anathoth' at the time an invading army held the land. A Roman paid down money for the ground on which the besiegers of Rome were encamped. It does not become Christians to be less confident of victory. But we have to take heed that our confidence is grounded on the right foundation. God's commandment to Joshua to allot the land, even while the formidable foes enumerated in the context held it firmly, was based on the assurance (verse 6): 'Them will I drive out before the children of Israel.' Confidence based on self is presumption, and will end in defeat; confidence based on God will brace to noble effort, which is all the more vigorous and will surely lead to victory, because it distrusts self.

III. The vigorous effort animated by both the preceding.

How the habit of thinking the unconquered land theirs would encourage Israel. Efforts without hope are feeble; hope without effort is fallacious.

Israel's history is significant. The land was never actually all conquered. God's promises are all conditional, and if we do not work, or if we work in any other spirit than in faith, we shall not win our allotted part in the 'inheritance of the saints in light.' It is possible to lose 'thy crown.' 'Work out your own salvation.' 'Trust in the Lord and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land.'

CALEB—A GREEN OLD AGE

'And Caleb . . . said unto him (Joshua), Thou knowest the thing that the Lord said unto Moses the man of God concerning me and thee in Kadesh-barnea.'—JOSHUA xiv. 6.

FIVE and forty years had passed since the Lord had 'said this thing.' It was the promise to these two, now old men, of the prolongation of their lives, and to Caleb of his inheritance in the land. Seven years of fighting have been got through, and the preparations are being made for the division of the land by lot. But, before that is done, it is fitting that Caleb, whose portion had been specially secured to him by that old promise, should have the promise specially recognised and endorsed by the action of the leader, and independent of the operation of the lot. So he appears before Joshua, accompanied by the head men of his tribe, whose presence expresses their official consent to the exceptional treatment of their tribesman, and urges his request in a little speech, full of pathos and beauty and unconscious portraiture of the speaker. I take it as a picture of an ideal old age, showing in an actual instance how happy, vigorous, full of buoyant energy and undiminished appetite for enterprise a devout old age may be. And my purpose now is not merely to comment on the few words of our text, but upon the whole of what falls from the lips of Caleb here.

I. I see then here, first, a life all built upon God's promise.

Five times in the course of his short plea with Joshua does he use the expression 'the Lord spake.' On the first occasion of the five he unites Joshua with himself as a recipient of the promise, 'Thou knowest the thing that the Lord said concerning me and thee.' But in the other four he takes it all to himself; not because it concerned him only, but because his confidence, laying hold of the promise, forgot his brother in the earnestness of his personal appropriation of it. And so, whatsoever general words God speaks to the world, a true believer will make them his very own; and when Christ says, 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish,' faith translates it into 'He loved me, and gave Himself for me.' This is the first characteristic of a life built upon the promise of God, that it lays its hand upon that promise and claims it all for its very own.

Then notice, still further, how for all these forty-five years Caleb had 'hid the word in his heart,' had lived upon it and thought about it and believed it, and recognised the partial fulfilment of it, and cherished the secret fire unknown to any besides. And now at last, after so long an interval, he comes forward and stretches out a hand, unweakened by the long delay, to claim the perfect fulfilment at the end of his days. So 'the vision may tarry,' but a life based upon God's promise has another estimate of swiftness and slowness than is current amongst men who have only the years of earthly life to reckon by; and that which to sense seems a long, weary delay, to faith seems but as 'a watch in the night.' The world, which only measures time by its own revolutions, has to lament over what seem to the sufferers long years of pains and tears, but in the calendar of faith 'weeping endures for a night, joy cometh in the morning.' The weary days dwindle into a point when they are looked at with an eye that has been accustomed to gaze on the solemn eternities of a promising and a faithful God. To it, as to Him, 'a thousand years are as one day'; and 'one day,' in the possibilities of divine favour and spiritual growth which it may enfold, 'as a thousand years.' To the men who measure time as God measures it, His help, howsoever long it may tarry, ever comes 'right early.'

Further, note how this life, built upon faith in the divine promise, was nourished and nurtured by instalments of fulfilment all along the road. Two promises were given to Caleb—one, that his life should be prolonged, and the other, that he should possess the territory into which he had so bravely ventured. The daily fulfilment of the one fed the fire of his faith in the ultimate accomplishment of the other, and he gratefully recounts it now, as part of his plea with Joshua—'Now, behold, the Lord hath kept me alive as He spake, these forty and five years, even since the Lord spake this word unto Moses. And now, lo! I am this day fourscore and five years old.'

Whosoever builds his life on the promise of God has in the present the guarantee of the better future. As we are journeying onwards to that great fountain-head of all sweetness and felicity, there are ever trickling brooks from it by the way, at which we may refresh our thirsty lips and invigorate our fainting strength. The present instalment carries with it the pledge of the full discharge of the obligation, and he whose heart and hope is fixed with a forward look on the divine inheritance, may, as he looks backward over all the years, see clearly in them one unbroken mass of preserving providences, and thankfully say, 'The Lord hath kept me alive, as He spake.'

And, still further, the life that is built upon faith like this man's, is a life of buoyant hopefulness till the very end. The hopes of age are few and tremulous. When the feast is nearly over, and the appetite is dulled, there is little more to be done, but to push back our chairs and go away. But God keeps 'the good wine' until the last. And when all earthly hopes are beginning to wear thin and to burn dim, then the great hope of 'the mountain of the inheritance' will rise brighter and clearer upon our horizon. It is something to have a hope so far in front of us that we never get up to it, to find it either less than our expectations or more than our desires; and this is not the least of the blessednesses of the living 'hope that maketh not ashamed,' that it lies before us till the very end, and beckons and draws us across the gulf of darkness. 'The Lord hath kept me alive, as He said; now give me this mountain whereof the Lord spake.'

II. Further, I see here a life that bears to be looked back at.

Caleb becomes almost garrulous in telling over the old story of that never-to-be-forgotten day, when he and Joshua stood alone and tried to put some heart into the cowardly mob before them. There is no mock modesty about the man. He says that, amidst many temptations to be untrue, he gave his report with sincerity and veracity, 'speaking as it was in mine heart,' and then he quotes twice, with a permissible satisfaction, the eulogium that had come upon him from the divine lips, 'I wholly followed the Lord my God.' The private soldier's cheek may well flush and his eye glitter as he repeats over again his general's praise. And for Caleb, half a century has not dimmed the impression that was made on his heart when he received that praise, through the lips of Moses, from God.

Now, of course, such a tone of speaking about one's past savours of an earlier stage in revelation than that in which we live, and, if this were to be taken as a man's total account of his whole life, we could not free it from the charge of unpleasing self-complacency and self-righteousness. But for all that, it is not the same thing in the retrospect whether you and I have to look back upon years that have been given to self, and the world, and passion, and pride, and covetousness, and frivolities and trifles of all sorts, or upon years that in the main, and regard being had to their deepest desires and governing direction, have been given to God and to His service. Many a man looking back upon his life—I wonder if there are any such men listening to me now—can only see such a sight as Abraham did on that morning when he looked down on the plain of Sodom, and 'Lo! the smoke of the land went up as the smoke of a furnace.' Dear friends! the only thing that makes life in the retrospect tolerable is that it shall have been given to God, and that we can say, 'I wholly followed the Lord my God.'

III. Again, I see here a life which has discovered the secret of perpetual youth.

'I,' says the old man—'am as strong this day as I was in the day when Moses sent me. As my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out and to come in.' For fighting, and for all the intercourse and manifold activities of life, his sinews are as braced, his eyes as clear, his spirit and limbs as alert as they were in those old days. No doubt you will say that was due to miraculous intervention. No doubt it was; but is it not true that, in a very real sense, a man may keep himself young all his life, if he will go the right way to work? And the secret of perpetual youthfulness lies here, in giving our hearts to God and in living for Him. Christianity, with its self-restraint and its exhortations to all, and especially to the young, to be chaste and temperate and to subdue the animal passions, has a direct tendency to conserve physical vigour; and Christianity, by the inspiration that it imparts, the stimulus that it gives, and the hopes that it permits us to cherish, has a direct tendency to keep alive in old age all the best of the characteristics of youth. Its buoyancy, its undimmed interest, its cheeriness, its freedom from anxiety and care—all these things are directly ministered to, and preserved by, a life of simple faith that casts itself upon God, and dwells securely, in joy and in restfulness, and not without a great light of hope, even when the shadows of evening are falling.

One of the greatest and most blessed of the characteristics of youth is the consciousness that the most of life lies before us; and to a Christian man, in any stage of his earthly life, that consciousness is possible. When he stands on the verge of the last sinking sandbank of time, and the water is up to his ankles, he may well feel that the best and the most of life is yet to be.

> 'The last of life, for which the first was made:
> Our times are in His hand
> Who saith, "A whole I planned.
> Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid."'

'They shall still bring forth fruit in old age, they shall be full of sap and green.' A gnarled old tree may be green in all its branches, and blossom and fruit may hang together there. The ideal of life is, that into each stage we shall carry the best of the preceding, harmonised with the best of the new, and that is possible to a Christian soul. The fountain of perpetual youth, of which the ancients fabled, is no fable, but a fact; and it rises, where the prophet in his vision saw the stream coming out, from beneath the threshold of the Temple door.

IV. So, lastly, I see here a beautiful example of a life which to the last is ready for danger and enterprise.

Caleb's words as to his undiminished strength were not meant for a boast. They express thankfulness and praise, and they are put as the ground of the request that he has to make. He gives a chivalrous reason for his petition when he says, 'Now, therefore, give me this mountain, *for* the Anakims (the giants) are there; and the cities great and fenced.'

Caleb's readiness for one more fight was fed by his reliance on God's help in it. When he says, 'It may be the Lord will be with me,' the *perhaps* is that of humility, not of doubt. The old warrior's eye flashes, and his voice sounds strong and full, as he ends his words with 'I *shall* drive them out, as *the Lord spake*.' That has the true ring. What were the three Anak chiefs, with their barbarous names, Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmai, and their giant stature, to the onset of a warrior faith like that? Of course, 'Caleb drove out thence the three sons of Anak,' and Hebron became his inheritance. Nothing can stand against us, if we seek for our portion, not where advantages are greatest, but where difficulties and dangers are most rife, and cast ourselves into the conflict, sure that God is with us, though humbly wondering that we should be worthy of His all-conquering presence, and sure, therefore, that victory marches by our sides.

Old age is generally much more disposed to talk about its past victories than to fight new ones; to rest upon its arms, or upon its laurels, than to undertake fresh conflicts. Now and then we see a man, statesman or other, who, bearing the burden of threescore years and ten lightly, is still as alert of spirit, as eager for work, as bold for enterprise, as he was years before. And in nine cases out of ten such a man is a Christian; and his brilliant energy of service is due, not only, nor so much, to natural vigour of constitution as to religion, which has preserved his vigour because it has preserved his purity, and been to him a stimulus and an inspiration.

Danger is an attraction to the generous mind. It is the coward and the selfish man who are always looking for an easy place, where somebody else will do the work. This man felt that this miraculously prolonged life of his bound him to special service, and the fact that up in Hebron there were a fenced city and tall giants behind the battlements, was an additional reason for picking out that bit of the field as the place where he ought to be. Thank God, that spirit is not dead yet! It has lived all through the Christian Church, and flamed up in times of martyrdom. On missionary fields to-day, if one man falls two are ready to step into his place. It is the true spirit of the Christian soldier. 'A great door and effectual is opened,' says Paul, 'and there are many adversaries.' He knew the door was opened *because* the adversaries were many. And because there were so many of them, would he run away? Some of us would have said: 'I must abandon that work, it bristles with difficulties; I cannot stop in that post, the bullets are whistling too fast.' Nay! says Paul; 'I abide till Pentecost'—a good long while—because the post is dangerous, and promises to be fruitful.

So, dear friends, if we would have lives on which we can look back, lives in which early freshness will last beyond the 'morning dew,' lives in which there shall come, day by day and moment by moment, abundant foretastes to stay our hunger until we sit at Christ's table in His kingdom, we must 'follow the Lord alway,' with no half-hearted surrender, nor partial devotion, but give ourselves to Him utterly, to be guided and sent where He will. And then, like Caleb, we shall be able to say, with a 'perhaps,' not of doubt, but of wonder, that it should be so, to us unworthy, 'It may be the Lord will be with me, and I shall drive them out.' In all these things 'we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.'

THE CITIES OF REFUGE

'The Lord also spake unto Joshua, saying, 2. Speak to the children of Israel, saying, Appoint out for you cities of refuge, whereof I spake unto you by the hand of Moses: 3. That the slayer that killeth any person unawares and unwittingly may flee thither: and they shall be your refuge from the avenger of blood. 4. And when he that doth flee unto one of those cities shall stand at the entering of the gate of the city, and shall declare his cause in the ears of the elders of that city, they shall take him into the city unto them, and give him a place, that he may dwell among them. 5. And if the avenger of blood pursue after him, then they shall not deliver the slayer up into his hand; because he smote his neighbour unwittingly, and hated him not beforetime. 6. And he shall dwell in that city, until he stand before the congregation for judgment, and until the death of the high priest that

shall be in those days: then shall the slayer return, and come unto his own city, and unto his own house, unto the city from whence he fled. 7. And they appointed Kedesh in Galilee in mount Naphtali, and Shechem in mount Ephraim, and Kirjath-arba, which is Hebron, in the mountain of Judah. 8. And on the other side Jordan by Jericho eastward, they assigned Bezer in the wilderness upon the plain out of the tribe of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead out of the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan out of the tribe of Manasseh. 9. These were the cities appointed for all the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them, that whosoever killeth any person at unawares might flee thither, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood, until he stood before the congregation.'—JOSHUA xx. 1-9.

OUR Lord has taught us that parts of the Mosaic legislation were given because of the 'hardness' of the people's hearts. The moral and religious condition of the recipients of revelation determines and is taken into account in the form and contents of revelation. That is strikingly obvious in this institution of the 'cities of refuge.' They have no typical meaning, though they may illustrate Christian truth. But their true significance is that they are instances of revelation permitting, and, while permitting, checking, a custom for the abolition of which Israel was not ready.

I. Cities of refuge were needed, because the 'avenger of blood' was recognised as performing an imperative duty. 'Blood for blood' was the law for the then stage of civilisation. The weaker the central authority, the more need for supplementing it with the wild justice of personal avenging. Neither Israel nor surrounding nations were fit for the higher commandment of the Sermon on the Mount. 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,' corresponded to their stage of progress; and to have hurried them forward to 'I say unto you, Resist not evil,' would only have led to weakening the restraint on evil, and would have had no response in the hearers' consciences. It is a commonplace that legislation which is too far ahead of public opinion is useless, except to make hypocrites. And the divine law was shaped in accordance with that truth. Therefore the *goel*, or kinsman-avenger of blood, was not only permitted but enjoined by Moses.

But the evils inherent in his existence were great. Blood feuds were handed down through generations, involving an ever-increasing number of innocent people, and finally leading to more murders than they prevented. But the thing could not be abolished. Therefore it was checked by this institution. The lessons taught by it are the gracious forbearance of God with the imperfections attaching to each stage of His people's moral and religious progress; the uselessness of violent changes forced on people who are not ready for them; the presence of a temporary element in the Old Testament law and ethics.

No doubt many things in the present institutions of so-called Christian nations and in the churches are destined to drop away, as the principles of Christianity become more clearly discerned and more honestly applied to social and national life. But the good shepherd does not overdrive his flock, but, like Jacob, 'leads on softly, according to the pace of the cattle that is before' him. We must be content to bring the world gradually to the Christian ideal. To abolish or to impose institutions or customs by force is useless. Revolutions made by violence never last. To fell the upas-tree may be very heroic, but what is the use of doing it, if the soil is full of seeds of others, and the climate and conditions favourable to their growth? Change the elevation of the land, and the 'flora' will change itself. Institutions are the outcome of the whole mental and moral state of a nation, and when that changes, and not till then, do they change. The New Testament in its treatment of slavery and war shows us the Christian way of destroying evils; namely, by establishing the principles which will make them impossible. It is better to girdle the tree and leave it do die than to fell it.

II. Another striking lesson from the cities of refuge is the now well-worn truth that the same act, when done from different motives, is not the same. The kinsman-avenger took no heed of the motive of the slaying. His duty was to slay, whatever the slayer's intention had been. The asylum of the city of refuge was open for the unintentional homicide, and for him only. Deliberate murder had no escape thither. So the lesson was taught that motive is of supreme importance in determining the nature of an act. In God's sight, a deed is done when it is determined on, and it is not done, though done, when it was not meant by the doer. 'Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer,' and he that killeth his brother unawares is none. We suppose ourselves to have learned that so thoroughly that it is trivial to repeat the lesson.

What, then, of our thoughts and desires which never come to light in acts? Do we recognise our criminality in regard to these as vividly as we should? Do we regulate the hidden man of the heart accordingly? A man may break all the commandments sitting in an easy-chair and doing nothing. Von Moltke fought the Austro-Prussian war in his cabinet in Berlin, bending over maps. The soldiers on the field were but pawns in the dreadful game. So our battles are waged, and we are beaten or conquerors, on the field of our inner desires and purposes. 'Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.'

III. The elaborately careful specification of cases which gave the fugitive a right to shelter in the city is set forth at length in Numbers xxxv. 15-24, and Deuteronomy xix. 4-13. The broad principle is there laid down that the cities were open for one who slew a man 'unwittingly.' But the plea of not intending to slay was held to be negatived, not only if intention could be otherwise shown but if the weapon used was such as would probably kill; such, for instance, as 'an instrument of iron,' or a stone, or a 'weapon of wood, whereby a man may die.' If we do what is likely to have a given result, we are responsible for that result, should it come about, even though we did not consciously seek to bring it. That is plain common sense. 'I never thought the house would catch fire' is no defence from the guilt of burning it down, if we fired a revolver into a powder barrel. Further, if the fatal blow was struck in 'hatred,' or if the slayer had lain in ambush to catch his victim, he was not allowed shelter. These careful definitions freed the cities from becoming nests of desperate criminals, as the 'sanctuaries' of the Middle Ages in Europe became. They were not harbours for the guilty, but asylums for the innocent.

IV. The procedure by which the fugitive secured protection is described at length in the passages cited, with which the briefer account here should be compared. It is not quite free from obscurity, but probably the process was as follows. Suppose the poor hunted man arrived panting at the limits of the city, perhaps with the avenger's sword within half a foot of his neck; he was safe for the time. But before he could enter the city, a preliminary inquiry was held 'at the gate' by the city elders. That could only be of a rough-and-ready kind; most frequently there would be no evidence available but the man's own word. It, however, secured *interim* protection. A fuller investigation followed, and, as would appear, was held in another place,—perhaps at the scene of the accident. 'The congregation' was the judge in this second examination, where the whole facts would be fully gone into, probably in the presence of the avenger. If the plea of non-intention was sustained, the fugitive was 'restored to his city of refuge,' and there remained safely till the death of the high-priest, when he was at liberty to return to his home, and to stay there without fear.

Attempts have been made to find a spiritual significance in this last provision of the law, and to make out a lame parallel between the death of the high-priest, which cancelled the crime of the fugitive, and the death of Christ, which takes away our sins. But—to say nothing of the fact that the fugitive was where he was just because he had done no crime—the parallel breaks down at other points. It is more probable that the death of one high-priest and the accession of another were regarded simply as closing one epoch and beginning another, just as a king's accession is often attended with an amnesty. It was natural to begin a new era with a clean sheet, as it were.

V. The selection of the cities brings out a difference between the Jewish right of asylum and the somewhat similar right in heathen and mediæval times. The temples or churches were usually the sanctuaries in these. But not the Tabernacle or Temple, but the priestly cities, were chosen here. Their inhabitants represented God to Israel, and as such were the fit persons to cast a shield over the fugitives; while yet their cities were less sacred than the Temple, and in them the innocent man-slayer could live for long years. The sanctity of the Temple was preserved intact, the necessary provision for possibly protracted stay was made, evils attendant on the use of the place of worship as a refuge were avoided.

Another reason—namely, accessibility swiftly from all parts of the land—dictated the choice of the cities, and also their number and locality. There were three on each side of Jordan, though the population was scantier on the east than on the west side, for the extent of country was about the same. They stood, roughly speaking, opposite each other,—Kedesh and Golan in the north, Shechem and Ramoth central, Hebron and Bezer in the south. So, wherever a fugitive was, he had no long distance between himself and safety.

We too have a 'strong city' to which we may 'continually resort.' The Israelite had right to enter only if his act had been inadvertent, but we have the right to hide ourselves in Christ just because we have sinned wilfully. The hurried, eager flight of the man who heard the tread of the avenger behind him, and dreaded every moment to be struck to the heart by his sword, may well set forth what should be the earnestness of our flight to 'lay hold on the hope set before us in the gospel.' His safety, as soon as he was within the gate, and could turn round and look calmly at the pursuer, shaking his useless spear and grinding his teeth in disappointment, is but a feeble shadow of the security of those who rest in Christ's love, and are sheltered by His work for sinners. 'I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall pluck them out of My hand.'

THE END OF THE WAR

'And the Lord gave unto Israel all the land which He sware to give unto their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. 44. And the Lord gave them rest round about, according to all that He sware unto their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before them; the Lord delivered all their enemies into their hand. 45. There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass.

'Then Joshua called the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, 2. And said unto them, Ye have kept all that Moses, the servant of the Lord commanded you, and have obeyed my voice in all that I commanded you: 3. Ye have not left your brethren these many days unto this day, but have kept the charge of the commandment of the Lord your God. 4. And now the Lord your God hath given rest unto your brethren, as He promised them: therefore now return ye, and get you unto your tents, and unto the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you on the other side Jordan. 5. But take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the Lord charged you, to love the Lord your God, and to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments, and to cleave unto Him, and to serve Him with all your heart, and with all your soul. 6. So Joshua blessed them, and sent them away: and they went unto their tents. 7. Now to the one half of the tribe of Manasseh Moses had given possession in Bashan: but unto the other half thereof gave Joshua among their brethren on this side Jordan westward. And when Joshua sent them away also unto their tents, then he blessed them, 8. And he spake unto them, saying, Return with much riches unto your tents, and with very much cattle, with silver, and with gold, and with brass, and with iron, and with very much raiment: divide the spoil of your enemies with your brethren. 9. And the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh returned, and departed from the children of Israel out of Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan, to go unto the country of Gilead, to the land of their possession, whereof they were possessed, according to the word of the Lord by the hand of Moses.'—JOSHUA xxi. 43-45; xxii. 1-9.

'THE old order changeth, giving place to new.' In this passage we have the breaking up of the congregation and the disbanding of the victorious army. The seven years of fighting had come to an end. The swords were to be 'beaten into plowshares,' and the comrades who had marched shoulder to shoulder, and shared the fierce excitement of many a bloody field, were to be scattered, each becoming a peaceful farmer or shepherd. A picturesque historian, of the modern 'special correspondent' sort, would have overlaid the narrative with sentiment and description; but how quietly the writer tells it, so that we have to bethink ourselves before we apprehend that we are reading the account of an epoch-making event! He fixes attention on two things, —the complete fulfilment of God's promises (xxi. 43-45) and the dismissal to their homes of the contingent from the trans-Jordanic tribes, whose departure was the signal that the war was ended (xxii. 1-8). We may consider the lessons from these two separately.

I. The triumphant record of God's faithfulness (xxi. 43-45). These three verses are the trophy reared on the battlefield, like the lion of Marathon, which the Greeks set on its sacred soil. But the only name inscribed on this monument is Jehovah's. Other memorials of victories have borne the pompous titles of commanders who arrogated the glory to themselves; but the Bible knows of only one conqueror, and that is God. 'The help that is done on earth, He doeth it all Himself.' The military genius and heroic constancy of Joshua, the eagerness for perilous honour that flamed, undimmed by age, in Caleb, the daring and strong arms of many a humble private in the ranks, have their due recognition and reward; but when the history that tells of these comes to sum up the whole, and to put the 'philosophy' of the conquest into a sentence, it has only one name to speak as cause of Israel's victory.

That is the true point of view from which to look at the history of the world and of the church in the world. The difference between the 'miraculous' conquest of Canaan and the 'ordinary' facts of history is not that God did the one and men do the other; both are equally, though in different methods, His acts. In the field of human affairs, as in the realm of nature, God is immanent, though in the former His working is complicated by the mysterious power of man's will to set itself in antagonism to His; while yet, in manner insoluble to us, His will is supreme. The very powers which are arrayed against Him are His gift, and the issues which they finally subserve are His appointment. It does not need that we should be able to pierce to the bottom of the bottomless in order to attain and hold fast by the great conviction that 'there is no power but of God,' and that 'from Him are all things, and to Him are all things.'

Especially does this trophy on the battlefield teach a needful lesson to us in the Christian warfare. We are ever apt to think too much of our visible weapons and leaders, and to forget our unseen and ever-present Commander, from whom comes all our power. We 'burn incense to our own net, and sacrifice to our own drag,' and, like the heathen conqueror of whom Habakkuk speaks, make our swords our gods (Hab. i. 11, 16). The Church has always been prone to hero-worship, and to the idolatry of its organisation, its methods, or its theology. Augustine did so and so; Luther smote the 'whited wall' (the Pope) a blow that made him reel; the Pilgrim Fathers carried a slip of the plant of religious liberty in a tiny pot across the Atlantic, and watered it with tears till it has grown a great tree; the Wesleys revived a formal Church,—let us sing hallelujahs to these great names! By all means; but do not let us forget whence they drew their power; and let us listen to Paul's question, 'Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but servants through whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?' And let us carve, deep-cut and indelible, in solitary conspicuousness, on the trophy that we rear on each well-fought field, the name of no man save 'Jesus only.' We read that on a pyramid in Egypt the name and sounding titles of the king in whose reign it was erected were blazoned on the plaster facing, but beneath that transitory inscription the name of the architect was hewn, imperishable, in the granite, and stood out when the plaster dropped away. So, when all the short-lived records which ascribe the events of the Church's progress to her great men have perished, the one name of the true builder will shine out, and 'at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow.' Let us not rely on our own skill, courage, talents, orthodoxy, or methods, nor try to 'build tabernacles' for the witnessing servants beside the central one for the supreme Lord, but ever seek to deepen our conviction that Christ, and Christ only, gives all their powers to all, and that to Him, and Him only, is all victory to be ascribed. That is an elementary and simple truth; but if we really lived in its power we should go into the battle with more confidence, and come out of it with less self-gratulation.

We may note, too, in these verses, the threefold repetition of one thought, that of God's punctual and perfect fulfilment of His word. He 'gave unto Israel all the land which He sware to give'; 'He gave them rest, . . . according to all that He sware'; 'there failed not aught of any good thing which the Lord had spoken.' It is the joy of thankful hearts to compare the promise with the reality, to lay the one upon the other, as it were, and to declare how precisely their outlines correspond. The finished building is exactly according to the plans drawn long before. God gives us the power of checking His work, and we are unworthy to receive His gifts if we do not take delight in marking and proclaiming how completely He has fulfilled His contract. It is no small part of Christian duty, and a still greater part of Christian blessedness to do this. Many a fulfilment passes unnoticed, and many a joy, which might be sacred and sweet as a token of love from His own hand, remains common and unhallowed, because we fail to see that it is a fulfilled promise. The eye that is trained to watch for God's being as good as His word will never have long to wait for proofs that He is so. 'Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even he shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord.' And to such a one faith will become easier, being sustained by experience; and a present thus manifestly studded with indications of God's faithfulness will merge into a future still fuller of these. For it does not need that we should wait for the end of the war to have many a token that His every word is true. The struggling soldier can say, 'No good thing has failed of all that the Lord has spoken.' We look, indeed, for completer fulfilment when the fighting is done; but there are 'brooks by the way' for the warriors in the thick of the fight, of which they drink, and, refreshed, 'lift up the head.' We need not postpone this glad acknowledgment till we can look back and down from the land of peace on the completed campaign, but may rear this trophy on many a field, whilst still we look for another conflict to-morrow.

II. The disbanding of the contingent from the tribes across Jordan (xxii. 1-8). Forty thousand fighting men, of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half of Manasseh, had willingly helped in the conquest, leaving their own newly-won homes on the eastern side of Jordan, and for seven long years taking their share in the hardships and dangers of their brethren. It was no small tax which they had thus cheerfully paid for the sake of brotherly unity. Their aid had not only been valuable as strengthening Joshua's force, but still more so as a witness of the unbroken oneness of the nation, and of the sympathy which the tribes already settled bore to the others. Politically, it was wise to associate the whole people in the whole conquest; for nothing welds a nation together like the glories of common victories and the remembrance of common dangers survived. The separation of the trans-Jordanic tribes by the rapid river, and by their pastoral life, was a possible source of weakness, and would, no doubt, have led to more complete severance, if it had not been for the uniting power of the campaign. If the forty thousand had been quietly feeding sheep on the uplands while their brethren were fighting among the stony hills of Canaan, a great gulf would have opened between them. Even as it was, the eastern tribes drifted somewhat away from the western; but the disintegration would have been still more complete if no memories of the war, when all Israel stood side by side, had lived on among them. Their share in the conquest was not only a piece of policy,—it was the natural expression of the national brotherhood. Even if Joshua had not ordered their presence, it would have been impossible for them to stop in their peacefulness and let their brethren bear the brunt of battle.

The law for us is the same as for these warriors. In the family, the city, the nation, the Church, and the world, union with others binds us to help them in their conflicts, and that especially if we are blessed with secure possessions, while they have to struggle for theirs. We are tempted to selfish lives of indulgence in our quiet peace, and sometimes think it hard that we should be expected to buckle on our armour, and leave our leisurely repose, because our brethren ask the help of our arms. If we did as Reuben and Gad did, would there be so many rich men who never stir a finger to relieve poverty, so many Christians whose religion is much more selfish than beneficent? Would so many souls be left to toil without help, to struggle without allies, to weep without comforters, to wander in the dark without a guide? All God's gifts in providence and in the Gospel are given that we may have somewhat wherewith to bless our less happy brethren. 'The service of man' is not the substitute for, but the expression of, Christianity. Are we not kept here, on this side Jordan, away for a time from our inheritance, for the very same reason that these men were separated from theirs,—that we may strike some strokes for God and our fellows in the great war? Dives, who lolls on his soft cushions, and has less pity for Lazarus than the dogs have, is Cain come to life again; and every Christian is either his brother's keeper or his murderer. Would that the Church of to-day, with infinitely deeper and sacreder ties knitting it to suffering, struggling humanity, had a tithe of the willing relinquishment of legitimate possessions and patient participation in the long campaign for God which kept these rude soldiers faithful to their flag and forgetful of home and ease, till their general gave them their discharge!

Note the commander's parting charge. They were about to depart for a life of comparative separation from the mass of the nation. Their remoteness and their occupations drew them away from the current of the national life, and gave them a kind of quasi-independence. They would necessarily be less directly under Joshua's control than the other tribes were. He sends them away with one commandment, the imperative stringency of which is expressed by the accumulation of expressions in verse 5. They are to give diligent heed to the law of Moses. Their obedience is to be based on love to God, who is their God no less than the God of the other tribes. It is to be comprehensive—they are 'to walk in all His ways'; it is to be resolute—they are 'to cleave to Him'; it is to be whole-hearted and whole-souled service, that will be the true bond between the separated parts of the whole. Independence so limited will be harmless; and, however wide apart their paths may lie, Israel will be one. In like manner the bond that knits all divisions of God's people together, however different their modes of life and thought, however unlike their homes and their work, is the similarity of relation to God. They are one in a common faith, a common love, a common obedience. Wider waters than Jordan part them. Graver differences of tasks and outlooks than separated these two sections of Israel part them. But all are one who love and obey the one Lord. The closer we cleave to Him, the nearer we shall be to all His tribes.

We need only note in a word how these departing soldiers, leaving the battlefield with their commander's praise and benediction, laden with much wealth, the spoil of their enemies, and fording the stream to reach the peaceful homes, which had long stood ready for them, may be taken, by a permissible play of fancy, as symbols of the faithful servants and soldiers of the true Joshua, at the end of their long warfare passing to the 'kingdom prepared for them before the foundation of the world,' bearing in their hands the wealth which, by God's grace, they had conquered from out of things here. *They* are not sent away by their Commander, but summoned by Him to the great peace of

His own presence; and while His lips give them the praise which is praise indeed, they inscribe on the perpetual memorial which they rear no name but His, who first wrought all their works in them, and now has ordained eternal peace for them.

THE NATIONAL OATH AT SHECHEM

'And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the Lord: for He is an holy God; He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. 20. If ye forsake the Lord, and serve strange gods, then He will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that He hath done you good. 21. And the people said unto Joshua, Nay; but we will serve the Lord. 22. And Joshua said unto the people, Ye are witnesses against yourselves, that ye have chosen you the Lord, to serve Him. And they said, We are witnesses. 23. Now therefore put away, said he, the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the Lord God of Israel. 24. And the people said unto Joshua, The Lord our God will we serve, and His voice will we obey. 25. So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an ordinance in Shechem. 26. And Joshua wrote these words in the book of the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up there under an oak, that was by the sanctuary of the Lord. 27. And Joshua said unto all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it hath heard all the words of the Lord which He spake unto us: it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God. 28. So Joshua let the people depart, every man unto his inheritance.'—JOSHUA xxiv. 19-28.

WE reach in this passage the close of an epoch. It narrates the last public act of Joshua and the last of the assembled people before they scatter 'every man unto his inheritance.' It was fitting that the transition from the nomad stage to that of settled abode in the land should be marked by the solemn renewal of the covenant, which is thus declared to be the willingly accepted law for the future national life. We have here the closing scene of that solemn assembly set before us.

The narrative carries us to Shechem, the lovely valley in the heart of the land, already consecrated by many patriarchal associations, and by that picturesque scene (Joshua viii. 30-35), when the gathered nation, ranged on the slopes of Ebal and Gerizim, listened to Joshua reading 'all that Moses commanded.' There, too, the coffin of Joseph, which had been reverently carried all through the desert and the war, was laid in the ground that Jacob had bought five hundred years ago, and which now had fallen to Joseph's descendants, the tribe of Ephraim. There was another reason for the selection of Shechem for this renewal of the covenant. The gathered representatives of Israel stood, at Shechem, on the very soil where, long ago, Abram had made his first resting-place as a stranger in the land, and had received the first divine pledge, 'unto thy seed will I give this land,' and had piled beneath the oak of Moreh his first altar (of which the weathered stones might still be there) to 'the Lord, who appeared unto him.' It was fitting that this cradle of the nation should witness their vow, as it witnessed the fulfilment of God's promise. What Plymouth Rock is to one side of the Atlantic, or Hastings Field to the other, Shechem was to Israel. Vows sworn there had sanctity added by the place. Nor did these remembrances exhaust the appropriateness of the site. The oak, which had waved green above Abram's altar, had looked down on another significant incident in the life of Jacob, when, in preparation for his journey to Bethel, he had made a clean sweep of the idols of his household, and buried them 'under the oak which was by Shechem' (Gen. xxxv. 2-4). His very words are quoted by Joshua in his command, in verse 23, and it is impossible to overlook the intention to parallel the two events. The spot which had seen the earlier act of purification from idolatry was for that very reason chosen for the later. It is possible that the same tree at whose roots the idols from beyond the river, which Leah and Rachel had brought, had been buried, was that under which Joshua set up his memorial stone; and it is possible that the very stone had been part of Abram's altar. But, in any case, the place was sacred by these past manifestations of God and devotions of the fathers, so that we need not wonder that Joshua selected it rather than Shiloh, where the ark was, for the scene of this national oath of obedience. Patriotism and devotion would both burn brighter in such an atmosphere. These considerations explain also the designation of the place as 'the sanctuary of the Lord,'—a phrase which has led some to think of the Tabernacle, and apparently occasioned the Septuagint reading of 'Shiloh' instead of 'Shechem' in verses 1 and 25. The precise rendering of the preposition in verse 26 (which the Revised Version has put in the margin) shows that the Tabernacle is not meant; for how could the oak-tree be 'in' the Tabernacle? Clearly, the open space, hallowed by so many remembrances, and by the appearance to Abram, was regarded as a sanctuary.

The earlier part of this chapter shows that the people, by their representatives, responded with alacrity—which to Joshua seemed too eager—to his charge, and enumerated with too facile tongues God's deliverances and benefits. His ear must have caught some tones of levity, if not of insincerity, in the lightly-made vow. So he meets it with a douche of cold water in verses 19, 20, because he wishes to condense vaporous resolutions into something more tangible and permanent. Cold, judiciously applied, solidifies. Discouragements, rightly put, encourage. The best way to deepen and confirm good resolutions which have been too swiftly and inconsiderately formed, is to state very plainly all the difficulty of keeping them. The hand that seems to repel, often most powerfully attracts. There is no better way of turning a somewhat careless 'we will' into a persistent 'nay, but we *will*,' than to interpose a 'ye cannot.' Many a boy has been made a sailor by the stories of hardships which his parents have meant as dissuasives. Joshua here is doing exactly what Jesus Christ often did. He refused glib vows because He desired whole hearts. His very longing that men should follow Him made Him send them back to bethink themselves when they promised to do it. 'Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest!' was answered by no recognition of the speaker's enthusiasm, and by no word of pleasure or invitation, but by the apparently cold repulse: 'Foxes have holes, birds of the air roosting-places; but the Son of Man has not where to lay His head. That is what you are offering to share. Do you stand to your words?' So, when once 'great multitudes' came to Him He turned on them, with no invitation in His words, and told them the hard conditions of discipleship as being entire self-renunciation. He will have no soldiers enlisted under false pretences. They shall know the full difficulties and trials which they must meet; and if, knowing these, they still are willing to take His yoke upon them, then how exuberant and warm the welcome which He gives!

There is a real danger that this side of the evangelist's work should be overlooked in the earnestness with which the other side is done. We cannot be too emphatic in our reiteration of Christ's call to all the 'weary and heavy-laden' to come unto Him, nor too confident in our assurance that whosoever comes will not be 'cast out'; but we may be, and, I fear, often are, defective in our repetition of Christ's demand for entire surrender, and of His warning to intending disciples of what they are taking upon them. We shall repel no true seeker by duly emphasising the difficulties of the Christian course. Perhaps, if there were more plain speaking about these at the beginning, there would be fewer backsliders and dead professors with 'a name to live.' Christ ran the risk of the rich ruler's going away sorrowful, and so should His messengers do. The sorrow tells of real desire, and the departure will sooner or later be exchanged for return with a deeper and more thorough purpose, if the earlier wish had any substance in it. If it had not, better that the consciousness of its hollowness should be forced upon the man, than that he should outwardly become what he is not really, —a Christian; for, in the one case, he may be led to reflection which may issue in thorough surrender; and in the other he will be a self-deceived deceiver, and probably an apostate.

Note the special form of Joshua's warning. It turns mainly on two points,—the extent of the obligations which they were so lightly incurring, and the heavy penalties of their infraction. As to the former, the vow to 'serve the Lord' had been made, as he fears, with small consideration of what it meant. In heathenism, the 'service' of a god is a mere matter of outward acts of so-called worship. There is absolutely no connection between religion and morality in idolatrous systems. The notion that the service of a god implies any duties in common life beyond ceremonial ones is wholly foreign to paganism in all its forms. The establishment of the opposite idea is wholly the consequence of revelation. So we need not wonder if the pagan conception of service was here in the minds of the vowing assembly. If we look at their vow, as recorded in verses 16-18, we see nothing in it which necessarily implies a loftier idea. Jehovah is their national God, who has fought and conquered for them, therefore they will 'serve Him.' If we substitute Baal, or Chemosh, or Nebo, or Ra, for Jehovah, this is exactly what we read on Moabite stones and Assyrian tablets and Egyptian tombs. The reasons for the service, and the service itself, are both suspiciously external. We are not judging the people more harshly than Joshua did; for he clearly was not satisfied with them, and the tone of his answer sufficiently shows what he thought wrong in them. Observe that he does not call Jehovah 'your God.' He does so afterwards; but in this grave reply to their exuberant enthusiasm he speaks of Him only as 'the Lord,' as if he would put stress on the monotheistic conception, which, at all events, does not appear in the people's words, and was probably dim in their thoughts. Then observe that he broadly asserts the impossibility of their serving the Lord; that is, of course, so long as they continued in their then tone of feeling about Him and His service.

Then observe the points in the character of God on which he dwells, as indicating the points which were left out of view by the people, and as fitted to rectify their notions of service. First, 'He is an holy God.' The scriptural idea of the holiness of God has a wider sweep than we often recognise. It fundamentally means His supreme and inaccessible elevation above the creature; which, of course, is manifested in His perfect separation from all sin, but has not regard to this only. Joshua here urges the infinite distance between man and God, and especially the infinite moral distance, in order to enforce a profounder conception of what goes to God's service. A holy God cannot have unholy worshippers. His service can be no mere ceremonial, but must be the bowing of the whole man before His majesty, the aspiration of the whole man after His loftiness, the transformation of the whole man into the reflection of His purity, the approach of the unholy to the Holy through a sacrifice which puts away sin.

Further, He is 'a jealous God.' 'Jealous' is an ugly word, with repulsive associations, and its application to God has sometimes been explained in ugly fashion, and has actually repelled men. But, rightly looked at, what does it mean but that God desires our whole hearts for His own, and loves us so much, and is so desirous to pour His love into us, that He will have no rivals in our love? The metaphor of marriage, which puts His love to men in the tenderest form, underlies this word, so harsh on the surface, but so gracious at the core.

There is still abundant need for Joshua's warning. We rejoice that it takes so little to be a Christian that the feeblest and simplest act of faith knits the soul to the all-forgiving Christ. But let us not forget that, on the other hand, it is hard to be a Christian indeed; for it means 'forsaking all that we have,' and loving God with all our powers. The measure of His love is the measure of His 'jealousy,' and He loves us no less than He did Israel. Unless our conceptions of His service are based upon our recognition of His holiness and demand for our all, we, too, 'cannot serve the Lord.'

The other half of Joshua's warnings refers to the penalties of the broken vows. These are put with extraordinary force. The declaration that the sins of the servants of God would not be forgiven is not, of course, to be taken so as to contradict the whole teaching of Scripture, but as meaning that the sins of His people cannot be left unpunished. The closer relation between God and them made retribution certain. The law of Israel's existence, which its history ever since has exemplified, was here laid down, that their prosperity depended on their allegiance, and that their nearness to Him ensured His chastisement for their sin. 'You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.'

The remainder of the incident must be briefly disposed of. These warnings produced the desired effect; for Joshua did not seek to prevent, but to make more intelligent and firm, the people's allegiance. The resolve, repeated after fuller knowledge, is the best reward, as it is the earnest hope, of the faithful teacher, whose apparent discouragements are meant to purify and deepen, not to repress, the faintest wish to serve God. Having tested their sincerity, he calls them to witness that their resolution is perfectly voluntary; and, on their endorsing it as their free choice, he requires the putting away of their 'strange gods,' and the surrender of their inward selves to Him who, by this their action as well as by His benefits, becomes in truth 'the God of Israel.' Attempts have been made to evade the implication that idolatry had crept in among the people; but there can be no doubt of the plain, sad meaning of the words. They are a quotation of Jacob's, at the same spot, on a similar occasion centuries before. If there were no idols buried now under the old oak, it was not because there were none in Israel, but because they had not been brought by the people from their homes. Joshua's commands are the practical outcome of his previous words. If God be 'holy' and 'jealous,' serving Him must demand the forsaking of all other gods, and the surrender of heart and self to Him. That is as true to-day as ever it was. The people accept the stringent requirement, and their repeated shout of obedience has a deeper tone than their first hasty utterance had. They have learned what service means,—that it includes more than ceremonies; and they are willing to obey His voice. Blessed those for whom the plain disclosure of all that they must give up to follow Him, only leads to the more assured and hearty response of willing surrender!

The simple but impressive ceremony which ratified the covenant thus renewed consisted of two parts,—the writing of the account of the transaction in 'the book of the law'; and the erection of a great stone, whose grey strength stood beneath the green oak, a silent witness that Israel, by his own choice, after full knowledge of all that the vow meant, had reiterated his vow to be the Lord's. Thus on the spot made sacred by so many ancient memories, the people ended their wandering and homeless life, and passed into the possession of the inheritance, through the portal of this fresh acceptance of the covenant, proclaiming thereby that they held the land on condition of serving God, and writing their own sentence in case of unfaithfulness. It was the last act of the assembled people, and the crown and close of Joshua's career.

THE BOOK OF JUDGES

A SUMMARY OF ISRAEL'S FAITHLESSNESS AND GOD'S PATIENCE

> 'And an angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I sware unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my covenant with you. 2. And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed my voice: why have ye done this? 3. Wherefore I also said, I will not drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you. 4. And it came to pass, when the angel of the Lord spake these words unto all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept. 5. And they called the name of that place Bochim: and they sacrificed there unto the Lord. 6. And when Joshua had let the people go, the children of Israel went every man unto his inheritance to possess the land. 7. And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the Lord that He did for Israel. 8. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being an hundred and ten years old. 9. And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash. 10. And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which He had done for Israel.'—JUDGES ii. 1-10.

THE Book of Judges begins a new era, the development of the nation in its land. Chapters i. to iii. 6 contain two summaries: first, of the progress of the conquest; and second, of the history about to be unfolded in the book. The first part of this passage (verses 1-5) belongs to the former, and closes it; the second (verses 6-10) introduces the latter, and contrasts it with the state of things prevailing as long as the soldiers of Joshua lived.

I. 'The Angel of the Lord' had appeared to Joshua in Gilgal at the beginning of the war, and issued his orders as 'Captain of the Lord's host.' Now He reappears to ask why his orders had not been carried out. and to announce that victory was no longer to attend Israel's arms. Nothing can be plainer than that the Angel speaks as one in whom the divine name dwells. His reiterated 'I's' are incomprehensible on any other hypothesis than that He is that mysterious person, distinct from and yet one with Jehovah, whom we know as the 'Word made flesh.' His words here are stern. He enumerates the favours which He had showed to Israel, and which should have inspired them to glad obedience. He recalls the conditions on which they had received the land; namely, that they were to enter into no entangling alliances with the remnant of the inhabitants, and especially to have no tolerance for their idolatry. Here we may observe that, according to Joshua's last charge, the extermination of the native peoples was not contemplated, but that there should be no such alliances as would peril Israel's observance of the covenant (Joshua xxiii. 7, 12). He charges them with disobedience, and asks the same question as had been asked of Eve, 'What is this ye have done?' And He declares the punishment about to follow, in the paralysing of Israel's conquering arm by the withdrawal of His conquering might, and in the seductions from the native inhabitants to which they would fall victims.

Note, then, how God's benefits aggravate our disobedience, and how He bases His right to command on them. Further, note how His promises are contingent on our fulfilment of their conditions, and how a covenant which He has sworn that He will never break He does count as non-existent when men break it. Again, observe the sharp arraignment of the faithless, and the forcing of them to bethink themselves of the true character of their deeds, or, if we adopt the Revised Version's rendering, of the unreasonableness of departing from God. No man dare answer when God asks, 'What hast thou done?' No man can answer reasonably when He asks, 'Why hast thou done it?' Once more, note that His servants sin when they allow themselves to be so mixed up with the world that they are in peril of learning its ways and getting a snare to their souls. We have all unconquered 'Canaanites' in our hearts, and amity with them is supreme folly and crying wickedness. 'Thorough' must be our motto. Many times have the conquered overcome their conquerors, as in Rome's conquest of Greece, the Goths' conquest of Rome, the Normans' conquest of England. Israel was in some respects conquered by Canaanites and other conquered tribes. Let us take care that we are not overcome by our inward foes, whom we fancy we have subdued and can afford to treat leniently.

Again, God punishes our making truce with our spiritual foes by letting the effects of the truce work themselves out. He said to Israel, in effect: 'If you make alliances with the people of the land, you shall no longer have power to cast them out. The swift rush of the stream of victory shall be stayed. You have chosen to make them your friends, and their friendship shall produce its natural effects, of tempting you to imitation.' The increased power of our unsubdued evils is the punishment, as it is the result, of tolerance of them. We wanted to keep them, and dreamed that we could control them. Keep them we shall, control them we cannot. They will master us if we do not expel them. No wonder that the place was named Bochim ('Weepers'), when such stern words were thundered forth. Tears flow easily; and many a sin is wept for once, and afterwards repeated often. So it was with Israel, as the narrative goes on to tell. Let us take the warning, and give heed to make repentance deep and lasting.

II. Verses 6-10 go back to an earlier period than the appearance of the Angel. We do not know how long the survivors of the conquering army lived in sufficient numbers to leaven opinion and practice. We may, however, roughly calculate that the youngest of these would be about twenty when the war began, and that about fifty years would see the end of the host that had crossed Jordan and stormed Jericho. If Joshua was of about the same age as Caleb, he would be about eighty at the beginning of the conquest, and lived thirty years afterwards, so that about twenty years after his death would be the limit of 'the elders that outlived Joshua.'

Verses 6-9 substantially repeat Joshua xxiv. 28-31, and are here inserted to mark not only the connection with the former book, but to indicate the beginning of a new epoch. The facts narrated in this paragraph are but too sadly in accord with the uniform tendencies of our poor weak nature. As long as some strong personality leads a nation or a church, it keeps true to its early fervour. The first generation which has lived through some great epoch, when God's arm has been made bare, retains the impression of His power. But when the leader falls, it is like withdrawing a magnet, and the heap of iron filings tumbles back to the ground inert. Think of the post-Apostolic age of the Church, of Germany in the generation after Luther, not to come nearer home, and we must see that Israel's experience was an all but universal one. It is hard to keep a community even of professing Christians on

good

note

note

the high level. No great cause is ever launched which does not lose 'way' as it continues. 'Having begun in the Spirit,' all such are too apt to continue 'in the flesh.' The original impulses wane, friction begins to tell. Custom clogs the wheels. The fiery lava-stream cools and slackens. So it always has been. Therefore God has to change His instruments, and churches need to be shaken up, and sometimes broken up, 'lest one good,' when it has degenerated into 'custom,' should 'corrupt the world.'

Note

But we shall miss the lesson here taught if we do not apply it to tendencies in ourselves, and humbly recognise that we are in danger of being 'hindered,' however 'well' we may have begun to 'run,' and that our only remedy is to renew continually our first-hand vision of 'the great works of the Lord,' and our consecration to His service. It is a poor affair if, like Israel, our devotion to God depends on Joshua's life, or, like King Joash, we do that which is 'right in the eyes of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest.'

ISRAEL'S OBSTINACY AND GOD'S PATIENCE

Summary of Israel

note

'And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim: 12. And they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger. 13. And they forsook the Lord, and served Baal and Ashtaroth. 14. And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and He delivered them into the hands of spoilers that spoiled them, and He sold them into the hands of their enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before their enemies. 15. Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed. 16. Nevertheless the Lord raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them. 17. And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the Lord; but they did not so. 18. And when the Lord raised them up judges, then the Lord was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the Lord because of their groanings, by reason of them that oppressed them, and vexed them. 19. And it came to pass

**when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way.
20. And the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel; and He said, Because that this people hath transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened unto My voice; 21. I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them of the nations which Joshua left when he died: 22. That through them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the Lord, to walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not. 23. Therefore the Lord left those nations, without driving them out hastily; neither delivered He them into the hand of Joshua.'—JUDGES ii. 11-23.**

THIS passage sums up the Book of Judges, and also the history of Israel for over four hundred years. Like the overture of an oratorio, it sounds the main themes of the story which follows. That story has four chapters, repeated with dreary monotony over and over again. They are: Relapse into idolatry, retribution, respite and deliverance, and brief return to God. The last of these phases soon passes into fresh relapse, and then the old round is gone all over again, as regularly as the white and red lights and the darkness reappear in a revolving lighthouse lantern, or the figures recur in a circulating decimal fraction. That sad phrase which begins this lesson, 'The children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord,' is repeated at the beginning of each new record of apostacy, on which duly follow, as outlined here, the oppression by the enemy, the raising up of a deliverer, the gleam of brightness which dies with him, and then, *da capo*, 'the children of Israel did evil,' and all the rest as before. The names change, but the incidents are the same. There is something extremely impressive in this uniformity of the plan of the book, which thus sets in so strong light the persistence through generations of the same bad strain in the nation's blood, and the unwearying patience of God. The story of these successive recurrences of the same sequence of events occupies the book to the end of chapter xvi., and the remainder of it is taken up with

good!
note.

two wild stories deeply stained with the lawlessness and moral laxity of these anarchic times. We may best bring out the force of this summary by considering in their order the four stages signalised.

I. The first is the continual tendency to relapse into idolatry. The fact itself, and the frank prominence given to it in the Old Testament, are both remarkable. As to the latter, certainly, if the Old Testament histories have the same origin as the chronicles of other nations, they present most anomalous features. Where do we find any other people whose annals contain nothing that can minister to national vanity, and have for one of their chief themes the sins of the nation? The history of Israel, as told in Scripture, is one long indictment of Israel. The peculiarity is explicable, if we believe that, whoever or how numerous soever its authors, God was its true Author, as He is its true theme, and that the object of its histories is not to tell the deeds of Israel, but those of God for Israel.

As to the fact of the continual relapses into idolatry, nothing could be more natural than that the recently received and but imperfectly assimilated revelation of the one God, with its stringent requirements of purity, and its severe prohibition of idols, should easily slip off from these rude and merely outward worshippers. Joshua's death without a successor, the dispersion of the tribes, the difficulty of communication when much of the country was still in the hands of its former possessors, would all weaken the sense of unity, which was too recent to be firm, and would expose the isolated Israelites to the full force of the temptation to idolatry. It is difficult for us fairly to judge the immense strain required for resistance to it. The conception of one sole God was too high to be easily retained. A shrine without a deity seemed bare and empty. The Law stringently bridled passions which the hideous worship of the Canaanites stimulated. No wonder that, when the first generation of the conquerors had passed away, their successors lapsed into the universal polytheism, with its attendant idolatry and immorality. Instead of thinking of the Israelites as monsters of ingratitude and backsliding, we come nearer the truth, and make a better use of the history, when we see in it a mirror which shows us our own image. The strong earthward pull is ever acting on us, and, unless God hold us up, we too shall slide downwards. 'Hath a nation changed their gods, which yet are no gods? but My people hath changed their glory for that which doth not profit.' Idolatry and worldliness are persistent; for they are natural. Firm adherence to God is less common, because it goes against the strong forces, within and without, which bind us to earth.

Apparently the relapses into idolatry did not imply the entire abandonment of the worship of Jehovah, but the worship of Baalim and Ashtaroth along with it. Such illegitimate mixing up of deities was accordant with the very essence of polytheism, and repugnant to that of the true worship of God. The one may be tolerant, the other cannot be. To unite Baal with Jehovah was to forsake Jehovah.

These continual relapses have an important bearing on the question of the origin of the 'Jewish conception of God.' They are intelligible only if we take the old-fashioned explanation, that its origin was a divine revelation, given to a rude people. They are unintelligible if we take the new-fashioned explanation that the monotheism of Israel was the product of natural evolution, or was anything but a treasure put by God into their hands, which they did not appreciate, and would willingly have thrown away. The foul Canaanitish worship was the kind of thing in which, if left to themselves, they would have wallowed. How came such people by such thoughts as these? The history of Israel's idolatry is not the least conclusive proof of the supernatural revelation which made Israel's religion.

II. Note the swift-following retribution. We have two sections in the context dealing with this, each introduced by that terrible phrase, which recurs so often in the subsequent parts of the book, 'The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel.' That phrase is no sign of a lower conception of God than that which the gospel brings. Wrath is an integral part of love, when good the lover is perfectly righteous and the loved are sinful. The most terrible anger is the anger of perfect gentleness, as expressed in that solemn paradox of the Apostle of love, when he speaks of 'the wrath of the Lamb.' God was angry with Israel because He loved them, and x desired their love for their own good. The fact of His choice of the nation for His own and the intensity of His love were shown no less by the swift certainty with which suffering dogged sin, than by the blessings which crowned obedience. The first section, referring to the punishment, is in verses 14 and 15, which seems to describe mainly the defeats and plunderings which outside surrounding nations inflicted. The brief description is extraordinarily energetic. It ascribes all their miseries to God's direct act. He 'delivered' them over, or, as the next clause says still more strongly, 'sold' them, to plunderers, who stripped them bare. Their defeats were the result of His having thus ceased to regard them as His. But though He had 'sold' them, He had not done with them; for it was not only the foeman's hand that struck them, but God's 'hand was against them,' and its grip crushed them. His judgments were not occasional, but continuous, and went with them 'whithersoever they went out.' Everything went wrong with them; there were no gleams breaking the black thunder-cloud. God's anger darkened the whole sky, and blasted the whole earth. And the misery was the more miserable and awful because it had all been foretold, and in it God was but doing 'as He had said' and sworn. It is a dreadful picture of the all-withering effect of God's anger,—a picture which is repeated in inmost verity in many an outwardly prosperous life to-day.

[illegible]

God's Anger

The second section is in verses 20-23, and describes the consequence of Israel's relapse in reference to the surviving Canaanite and other tribes in the land itself. Note that 'nation' in verse 20 is the term usually applied, not to Israel, but to the Gentile peoples; and that its use here seems equivalent to cancelling the choice of Israel as God's special possession, and reducing them to the level of the other nations in Canaan, to whom the same term is applied in verse 21. The stern words which are here put into the mouth of God may possibly refer to the actual message recorded in the first verses of the chapter; but, more probably, 'the Lord said' does not here mean any divine communication, but only the divine resolve, conceived as spoken to himself. It embodies the divine *lex talionis*. The punishment is analogous to the crime. Israel had broken the covenant; God would not keep His promise. That involves a great principle as to all God's promises,—that they are all conditional, and voidable by men's failure to fulfil their conditions. Observe, too, that the punishment is the retention of the occasions of the sin. Is not that, too, a law of the divine procedure to-day? Whips to scourge us are made of our pleasant vices. Sin is the punishment of sin. If we yield to some temptation, part of the avenging retribution is that the temptation abides by us, and has power over us. The 'Canaanites' whom we have allowed to lead us astray will stay beside us when their power to seduce us is done, and will pull off their masks and show themselves for what they are, our spoilers and foes.

Good!

The rate of Israel's conquest was determined by Israel's faithful adherence to God. That is a standing law. Victory for us in all the good fight of life depends on our cleaving to Him, and forsaking all other.

The divine motive, if we may so say, in leaving the unsubdued nations in the land, was to provide the means of proving Israel. Would it not have been better, since Israel was so weak, to secure for it an untempted period? Surely, it is a strange way of helping a man who has stumbled, to make provision that future occasions of stumbling shall lie in his path. But so the perfect wisdom which is perfect love ever ordains. There shall be no unnatural greenhouse shelter provided for weak plants. The liability to fall imposes the necessity of trial, but the trial does not impose the necessity of falling! The Devil tempts, because he hopes that we shall fall. God tries, in order that we may stand, and that our feet may be strengthened by the trial. 'I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for,—not without dust and heat.'

III. Respite and deliverance are described in verses

16 and 18. The Revised Version has wisely substituted a simple 'and' for 'nevertheless' at the beginning of verse 16. The latter word implies that the raising up of the judges was a reversal of what had gone before; 'and' implies that it was a continuation. And its use here is not merely an instance of inartificial Hebrew style, but carries the lesson that God's judgment and deliverance come from the same source, and are harmonious parts of one educational process. Nor is this thought negatived by the statement in verse 18 that 'it repented the Lord.' That strong metaphorical ascription to Him of human emotion simply implies that His action, which of necessity is the expression of His will, was changed. The will of the moment before had been to punish; the will of the next moment was to deliver, because their 'groaning' showed that the punishment had done its work. But the two wills were one in ultimate purpose, and the two sets of acts were equally and harmoniously parts of one design. The surgeon is carrying out one plan when he cuts deep into the quivering flesh, and when he sews up the wounds which he himself has made. God's deliverances are linked to His chastisements by 'and,' not by 'nevertheless.' We need not discuss that remarkable series of judges, who were champions rather than the peaceful functionaries whom we understand by the name. The vivid and stirring stories associated with their names make the bulk of this book, and move the most peace-loving among us like the sound of a trumpet. These wild warriors, with many a roughness and flaw in their characters, of whom no saintly traits are recorded, are yet treated in this section as directly inspired, and as continually upheld by God. The writer of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* claims some of them as heroes of

'faith.' And one chief lesson for us to learn, as we look on the strange garb in which in them faith has arrayed itself, and the strange work which it does in nerving hands to strike with sharp swords, is the oneness of the principle amid the most diverse manifestations, and the nobleness and strength which the sense of belonging to God and reliance on His help breathe into the rudest life and shed over the wildest scenes.

These judges were raised up indiscriminately from different tribes. They belonged to different ranks, and were of different occupations. One of them was a woman. The when and the where and the how of their appearance were incalculable. They authenticated their commission by no miracles except victory. For a time they started to the front, and then passed, leaving no successors, and founding no dynasty. They were an entirely unique order, plainly raised up by God, and drawing all their power from Him. Let us be thankful for the weaknesses, and even sins, recorded of some of them, and for the boldness with which the book traces the physical strength of a Samson, in spite of his wild animalism, and the bravery of a Jephthah, notwithstanding his savage vow and subsequent lapse into idolatry, to God's inspiration. Their faith was limited, and acted but imperfectly on their moral nature; but it was true faith, in the judgment of the *Epistle to the Hebrews*. Their work was rough and bloody, and they were rough tools, as such work needed; but it was God's work, and He had made them for His instruments, in the judgment of the Book of *Judges*. If we try to understand the reasons for such judgments, we may learn some useful lessons.

Good Pt. IV. A word only can be given to the last stage in the dreary round. It comes back to the first. The religion of the delivered people lasted as long as the judge's life. When he died, it died. There is intense bitterness in the remark to that effect in verse 19. Did God then die with the judge? Was it Samson, or Jehovah, that had delivered? Why should the death of the instrument affect gratitude to the hand that gave it its edge? What a lurid light is thrown back on the unreality of the people's return to God by their swift relapse! If it needed a human hand to keep them from departing, had they ever come near? We may press the questions on ourselves; for none of us knows how much of our religion is owing to the influence of men upon us, or how much of it would drop away if we were left to ourselves.

This miserable repetition of the same weary round of sin, punishment, respite, and renewed sin, sets in a strong light the two great wonders of man's obstinate persistency in unfaithfulness and sin, and of God's unwearied persistency in discipline and patient forgiveness. His charity 'suffers long and is kind, is not easily provoked.' We can weary out all forbearance but His, which is endless. We weary Him indeed, but we do not weary Him out, with our iniquities. Man's sin stretches far; but God's patient love overlaps it. It lasts long; but God's love is eternal. It resists miracles of chastisement and love; but He does not cease His use of the rod and the staff. We can tire out all other forbearance, but not His. And however old and obstinate our rebellion, He waits to pardon, and smites but to heal.

God

RECREANT REUBEN

'Why satest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the pipings for the flocks? At the watercourses of Reuben there were great searchings of heart.'—JUDGES v. 16 (R.V.).

I. THE fight.

The warfare is ever repeated, though in new forms.

In the highest form it is Christ *versus* the World.

And that conflict must be fought out in our own souls first. Our religion should lead not only to accept and rely on what Christ does for us, but to do and dare for Christ. He has given Himself for us, and has thereby won the right to recruit us as His soldiers. We have to fight against ourselves to establish His reign over ourselves.

And then we have to give our personal service in the great battle for right and truth, for establishing the kingdom of heaven on earth. There come national crises when every man must take up arms, but in Christ's kingdom that is a permanent obligation. There the nation is the army. Each subject is not only His servant but His soldier. The metaphor is well worn, but it carries everlasting truth, and to take it seriously to heart would revolutionise our lives.

II. The reason for standing aloof.

Reuben 'abode in the sheepfolds to hear the pipings to the flocks.' For Dan his ships, for Asher his havens held them apart. Reuben and the other trans-Jordanic tribes held loosely by the national unity. They had fallen in love with an easy life of pastoral wealth, they did not care to venture anything for the national good. It is still too true that like reasons are largely operative in producing like results. It is seldom from the wealthy and leisurely classes that the bold fighters for great social reformations are recruited. Times of commercial prosperity are usually times of stagnation in regard to these. Reuben lies lazily listening to the 'drowsy tinklings' that 'lull' not only 'the distant folds' but himself to inglorious slumber, while Zebulon and Naphtali are 'venturing their lives on the high places of the field.' The love of ease enervates many a one who should be doing valiantly for the 'Captain of his salvation.' The men of Reuben cared more for their sheep than for their nation. They were not minded to hazard these by listening to Deborah's call. And what their flocks were to that pastoral tribe, their business is to shoals of professing Christians. The love of the world depletes the ranks of Christ's army, and they are comparatively few who stick by the colours and are 'ready, aye ready' for service, as the brave motto of one English regiment has it. The lives of multitudes of so-called Christians are divided between strained energy in their business or trade or profession and self-regarding repose. No doubt competition is fierce, and, no doubt, a Christian man is bound, 'whatsoever his hand finds to do, to do it with his might,' and, no doubt, rest is as much a duty as work. But must not loyalty to Jesus have become tepid, if a servant of His has so little interest in the purposes for which He gave His life that he can hear no call to take active part in promoting them, nor find rest in the work by which he becomes a fellow-worker with his Lord?

nota

good!

Good!

ready! for service

III. The recreant's brave resolves which came to nothing. The indignant question of our text is, as it were, framed between two clauses which contrast Reuben's indolent holding aloof with his valorous resolves. 'By the watercourses of Reuben there were great resolves of heart.' . . . 'At the watercourses of

Reuben there were great searchings of heart.' Resolves came first, but they were not immediately acted on, and as the Reubenites sate among the sheepfolds and felt the charm of their peaceful lives, the 'native hue of resolution was sicklied o'er,' and doubts of the wisdom of their gallant determination crept in, and their valour oozed out. And so for all their fine resolves, they had no share in the fight nor in the triumph.

good

So let us lay the warning of that example to heart, and if we are stirred by noble impulses to take our place in the ranks of the fighters for God, let us act on these at once. Emotions evaporate very soon if they are not used to drive the wheels of conduct. The Psalmist was wise who 'delayed not, but made haste and delayed not to keep God's commandments.' Many a man has over and over again resolved to serve God in some specific fashion, and to enlist in the 'effective force' of Christ's army, and has died without ever having done it.

good

IV. The question in the hour of victory. 'Why?'

Deborah asks it with vehement contempt.

That victory is certain. Are *you* to have part in it?

good!

The question will be asked on the judgment day by Christ, and by our own consciences. 'And he was speechless.'

To be neutral is to be on the side of the enemy, against whom the 'stars fight,' and whom Kishon sweeps away.

good!

'Who is on the Lord's side?'—Who?

'ALL THINGS ARE YOURS'

'They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.'—JUDGES v. 20.

'For thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field: and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee.'—JOB v. 23.

THESE two poetical fragments present the same truth on opposite sides. The first of them comes from Deborah's triumphant chant. The singer identifies God with the cause of Israel, and declares that heaven itself fought against those who fought against God's people. There may be an allusion to the tempest which Jewish tradition tells us burst over the ranks of the enemy, or there may be some trace of ancient astrological notions, or the words may simply be an elevated way of saying that Heaven fought for Israel. The silent stars as they swept on their paths through the sky, advanced like an avenging host embattled against the foes of Israel and of God. All things fight against the man who fights against God.

*

[illegible]

good!

The other text gives the other side of the same truth. One of Job's friends is rubbing salt into his wounds by insisting on the commonplace, which needs a great many explanations and limitations before it can be accepted as true, that sin is the cause of sorrow, and that righteousness brings happiness; and in the course of trying to establish this heartless thesis to a heavy heart he breaks into a strain of the loftiest poetry in describing the blessedness of the righteous. All things, animate and inanimate, are upon his side. The ground, which Genesis tells us is 'cursed for his sake,' becomes his ally, and the very creatures whom man's sin set at enmity against him are at peace with him. All things

good

are the friends and servants of him who is the friend and servant of God.

Good!

I. So, putting these two texts together, we have first the great conviction to which religion clings, that God being on our side all things are for us, and not against us.

Now, that is the standing faith of the Old Testament, which no doubt was more easily held in those days, because, if we accept its teaching, we shall recognise that Israel lived under a system in so far supernatural as that moral goodness and material prosperity were a great deal more closely and indissolubly connected than they are to-day. So, many a psalmist and many a prophet breaks out into apostrophes, warranted by the whole history of Israel, and declaring how blessed are the men who, apart from all other defences and sources of prosperity, have God for their help and Him for their hope.

But we are not to dismiss this conviction as belonging only to a system where the supernatural comes in, as it does in the Old Testament history, and as antiquated under a dispensation such as that in which we live. For the New Testament is not a whit behind the Old in insisting upon this truth. 'All things work together for good to them that love God.' 'All things are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.' 'Who is he that will harm you if ye be followers of that which is good?' The New Testament is committed to the same conviction as that to which the faith of Old Testament saints clung as the sheet anchor of their lives.

That conviction cannot be struck out of the creed of any man, who believes in the God to whom the Old and the New Testament alike bear witness. For it rests upon this plain principle, that all this great universe is not a chaos, but a cosmos, that all these forces and creatures are not a rabble, but an ordered host.

What is the meaning of that great Name by which, from of old, God in His relations to the whole universe has been described—the 'Lord of Hosts'? Who are the 'hosts' of which He is 'the Lord,' and to whom, as the centurion said, He says to this one, 'Go!' and he goeth; and to another, 'Come!' and he cometh; and to another, 'Do this!' and he doeth it? Who are 'the hosts'? Not only these beings who are dimly revealed to us as rational and intelligent, who 'excel in strength,' because they 'hearken to the voice of His word,' but in the ranks of that great army are also embattled all the forces of the universe, and all things living or dead. 'All are Thy servants; they continue this day'—angels, stars, creatures of earth—'according to Thine ordinances.'

And if it be true that the All is an ordered whole, which is obedient to the touch and to the will of that divine Commander, then all His servants must be on the same side, and cannot turn their arms against each other. As an old hymn says with another reference—

good

excellent

'All the servants of our King
In heaven and earth are one,'

and none of them can injure, wound, or slay a fellow-servant. If all are travelling in the same direction there can be no collision. If all are enlisted under the same standard they can never turn their weapons against each other. If God sways all things, then all things which God sways must be on the side of the men that are on the side of God. 'Thou shalt make a league with the stones of the field: and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee.'

good!

II. Note the difficulties arising from experience, in the way of holding fast by this conviction of faith.

The grim facts of the world, seen from their lowest level, seem to shatter it to atoms. Talk about 'the stars in their courses fighting' for or against anybody! In one aspect it is superstition, in another aspect it is a dream and an illusion. The prose truth is that they shine down silent, pitiless, cold, indifferent, on battlefields or on peaceful homes; and the moonlight is as pure when it falls upon broken hearts as when it falls upon glad ones. Nature is utterly indifferent to the moral or the religious character of its victims. It goes on its way unswerving and pitiless; and whether the man who stands in its path is good or bad matters not. If he gets into a typhoon he will be wrecked; if he tumbles over Niagara he will be drowned. And what becomes of all the talk about an embattled universe on the side of goodness, in the face of the plain facts of life—of nature's indifference, nature's cruelty which has led some men to believe in two sovereign powers, one beneficent and one malicious, and has led others to say, 'God is a superfluous hypothesis, and to believe in Him brings more enigmas than it solves,' and has led still others to say, 'Why, if there *is* a God, does it look as if either He was not all-powerful, or was not all-merciful?' Nature has but ambiguous evidence to give in support of this conviction.

Then, if we turn to what we call Providence and its mysteries, the very book of Job, from which my second text is taken, is one of the earliest attempts to grapple with the difficulty and to untie the knot; and I suppose everybody will admit that, whatever may be the solution which is suggested by that enigmatical book, the solution is by no means a complete one, though it is as complete as the state of religious knowledge at the time at which the book was written made possible to be attained. The seventy-third psalm shows that even in that old time when, as I have said, supernatural sanctions were introduced into the ordinary dealings of life, the difficulties that cropped up were great enough to bring a devout heart to a stand, and to make the Psalmist say, 'My feet were almost gone; my steps had well-nigh slipped.' Providence, with all its depths and mysteries, often to our aching hearts seems in our own lives to contradict the conviction, and when we look out over the sadness of humanity, still more does it seem impossible for us to hold fast by the faith 'that all which we behold is full of blessings.'

I doubt not that there are many of ourselves whose lives, shadowed, darkened, hemmed in, perplexed, or made solitary for ever, seem to them to be hard to reconcile with this cheerful faith upon which I am trying to insist. Brethren, cling to it even in the darkness. Be sure of this, that amongst all our mercies there are none more truly merciful than those which come to us shrouded in dark garments, and in questionable shapes. Let nothing rob us of the confidence that 'all things work together for good.'

good!

III. I come, lastly, to consider the higher form in which this conviction is true for ever.

I have said that the facts of life seem often to us, and are felt often by some of us, to shatter it to atoms; to riddle it through and through with shot. But, if we bring the Pattern-life to bear upon the illumination of all life, and if we learn the lessons of the Cradle and the Cross, and rise to the view of human life which emerges from the example of Jesus Christ, then we get back the old conviction, transfigured indeed, but firmer than ever. We have to alter the point of view. Everything always depends on the point of view. We have to alter one or two definitions. Definitions come first in geometry and in everything else. Get *them* right, and you will get your theorems and problems right.

So, looking at life in the light of Christ, we have to give new contents to the two words 'good' and 'evil,' and a new meaning to the two words 'for' and 'against.' And when we do that, then the difficulties straighten themselves out, and there are not any more knots, but all is plain; and the old faith of the Old Testament, which reposed very largely upon abnormal and extraordinary conditions of life, comes back in a still nobler form, as possible to be held by us amidst the commonplace of our daily existence.

For everything is my friend, is for me and not against me, that helps me nearer to God. To live for Him, to live with Him, to be conscious ever of communion with Himself, to feel the touch of His hand on my hand, and the pressure of His breast against mine, at all moments of my life, is my true and the highest good. And if it is true that the 'river of the water of life' which 'flows from the Throne of God' is the only draught that can ever satisfy the immortal thirst of a soul, then whatever drives me away from the cisterns and to the fountain, is on my side. Better to dwell in a 'dry and thirsty land, where no water is,' if it makes me long for the water that rises at the gate of the true Bethlehem—the house of bread—than to dwell in a land flowing with milk and honey, and well watered in every part! If the cup that I would fain lift to my lips has poison in it, or if its sweetness is making me lose my relish for the pure and tasteless river that flows from the Throne of God, there can be no truer friend than that calamity, as men call it, which strikes the cup from my hands, and shivers the glass before I have raised it to my lips. Everything is my friend that helps me towards God.

Everything is my friend that leads me to submission and obedience. The joy of life, and the perfection of human nature, is an absolutely submitted will, identified with the divine, both in regard to doing and to enduring. And whatever tends to make my will flexible, so that it corresponds to all the sinuosities, so to speak, of the divine will, and fits into all its bends and turns, is a blessing to me. Raw hides, stiff with dirt and blood, are put into a bath of bitter infusion of oak-bark. What for? For the same end as, when they are taken out, they are scraped with sharp steels,—that they may become flexible. When that is done the useless hide is worth something.

'Our wills are ours, we know not how;
Our wills are ours, to make them Thine.'

And whatever helps me to that is my friend.

Everything is a friend to the man that loves God, in a far sweeter and deeper sense than it can ever be to any other. Like a sudden burst of sunshine upon a gloomy landscape, the light of union with God and friendship with Him flooding my daily life flashes it all up into brightness. The dark ribbon of the river that went creeping through the black copses, when the sun glints upon it, gleams up into links of silver, and the trees by its bank blaze out into green and gold. Brethren! 'Who follows pleasure follows pain'; who follows God finds pleasure following him. There can be no surer way to set the world against me than to try to make it for me, and to make it my all. They tell us that if you want to count those stars that 'like a swarm of fire-flies tangled in a silver braid' make up the Pleiades, the surest way to see the greatest number of them is to look a little on one side of them. Look away from the joys and friendships of creatural things right up to God, and you will see these sparkling and dancing in the skies, as you never see them when you gaze at them only. Make them second and they are good and on your side. Make them first, and they will turn to be your enemies and fight against you.

This conviction will be established still more irrefragably and wonderfully in that future. Nothing lasts but goodness. 'He that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.' To oppose it is like stretching a piece of pack-thread across the rails before the express comes; or putting up some thin wooden partition on the beach on one of the Western Hebrides, exposed to the whole roll of the Atlantic, which will be battered into ruin by the first winter's storm. Such is the end of all those who set themselves against God.

But there comes a future in which, as dim hints tell us, these texts of ours shall receive a fulfilment beyond that realised in the present condition of things. 'Then comes the statelier Eden back to man,' and in a renewed and redeemed earth 'they shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain'; and the ancient story will be repeated in higher form. The servants shall be like the Lord who, when He had conquered temptation, 'was with the wild beasts' that forgot their enmity, and 'angels ministered unto Him.' That scene in the desert may serve as a prophecy of the future when, under conditions of which we know nothing, all God's servants shall, even more markedly and manifestly than here, help each other; and every man that loves God will find a friend in every creature. note

If we take Him for our Commander, and enlist ourselves in that embattled host, then all weathers will be good; 'stormy winds, fulfilling His word,' will blow us to our port; 'the wilderness will rejoice and blossom as the rose'; and the whole universe will be radiant with the light of His presence, and ringing with the music of His voice. note But if we elect to join the other army—for there is another army, and men have wills that enable them to lift themselves up against God, the Ruler of all things—then the old story, from which my first text is taken, will fulfil itself again in regard to us—'the stars in their courses will fight against' us; and Sisera, lying stiff and stark, with Jael's tent-peg through his temples, and the swollen corpses being swirled down to the stormy sea by 'that ancient river, the river Kishon,' will be a grim parable of the end of the men that set themselves against God, and so have the universe against them. 'Choose ye this day whom ye will serve.' good!

LOVE MAKES SUNS

'Let them that love Him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might.'
JUDGES v. 31.

THESE are the closing words of Deborah, the great warrior-prophetess of Israel. They are in singular contrast with the tone of fierce enthusiasm for battle which throbs through the rest of the chant, and with its stern approval of the deed of Jael when she slew Sisera. Here, in its last notes, we have an anticipation of the highest and best truths of the Gospel. 'Let them that love Him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might.' If we think of the singer, of the age and the occasion of the song, such purely spiritual, lofty words must seem very remarkable.

I. Note, then, first of all, how here we have a penetrating insight into the essence of religion.

note

This woman had been nourished upon a more or less perfect edition of what we know as the 'Mosaic Law.' Her faith had been fed by forms. She moved amidst a world full of the cruelties and dark conceptions of a mysterious divine power which torture heathenism apart from Christianity. She had forced her way through all that, and laid hold of the vital centre. And there, away out amidst cruelty and murder, amidst the unutterable abominations and terrors of heathenism, in the centre of a rigid system of ceremonial and retaliation, the woman's heart spoke out, and taught her what was the great commandment. Prophetess she was, fighter she was, she could burst into triumphant approval of Jael's bloody deed; and yet with the same lips could speak this profound word. She had learned that 'Thou shalt *love* the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind,' summed up all duty, and was the beginning of all good in man. That precept found an echo in her heart. Whatever part in her religious development may have been played by the externalisms of ceremonial, she had pierced to the core of religion. Advanced modern critics admit the antiquity of Deborah's song, and this closing stanza witnesses to the existence, at that early period, of a highly spiritual conception of the bond between God and man. Deborah had got as far, in a moment of exaltation and insight

DEBORAH

good

as the teaching of the Apostle John, although her thought was strangely blended with the fierceness of the times in which she lived. Her approval of Jael's deed by no means warrants our approving it, but we may thankfully see that though she felt the fierce throbbing of desire for vengeance, she also felt this—'Them that *love* Him; that is the Alpha and the Omega of all.'

Our love must depend on our knowledge. Deborah's knowledge was a mere skeleton outline as compared with ours. Contrast the fervour of emotional affection that manifestly throbbed in her heart with the poor, cold pulsations which we dignify by the name of love, and the contrast may put us to shame. There is a religion of fear which dominates hundreds of professing Christians in this land of ours. There is a religion of duty, in which there is no delight, which has many adherents amongst us. There is a religion of form, which contents itself with the externals of Christianity, and that is the religion of many men and women in all our churches. And I may further say, there is a religion of faith, in its narrower and imperfect sense, which lays hold of and believes a body of Christian truth, and has never passed through faith into love. Not he who 'believes that God is,' and comes to Him with formal service and an alienated or negligent heart; not he who recognises the duty of worship, and discharges it because his conscience pricks him, but has no buoyancy within bearing him upwards towards the object of his love; not he who cowers before the dark shadow which some call God; but he who, knowing, trusts, and who, knowing and trusting 'the love which God hath to us,' pulses back the throbs of a recipient heart, and loves Him in return—he, and he only, is a

Good

worshipper. Let us learn the lesson that Deborah learnt below the palm-trees of Lapidoth, and if we want to understand what a religious man is, recognise that he is a man who loves God.

II. Further, note the grand conception of the character which such a love produces.

'Let them be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might.' Think of the fierce Eastern sun, with 'sunbeams like swords,' that springs up from the East, and rushes to the zenith, and 'nothing is hid from the heat thereof'—a sun the like of which we, in our cloudy skies, never see nor feel, but which, to the Oriental, is the very emblem of splendour and of continuous, victorious power. There are two things here, radiance and energy, light and might.

'As the sun when he goeth forth in his strength.' Deborah was a 'prophetess,' and people say, 'What did she prophesy?' Well, she prophesied the heart of religion—as I have tried to show—in reference to its essence, and, as one sees by this phrase, in reference to its effects. What is her word but a partial anticipation of Christ's saying, 'Ye are the light of the world'; Goo and of His disciple's utterance, 'Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light'?

It is too plain to need any talking about, that the direct tendency of what we venture to call love to God, meaning thereby the turning of the whole nature to Him, in aspiration, admiration, longing for likeness, and practical imitation, is to elevate, ennoble, and illuminate the whole character. It was said about one woman that 'to love her was an education.' That was exaggeration; but it is below the truth about God The true way to refine and elevate and educate is to

Good

cultivate love to God. And when we get near to Him, and hold by Him, and are continually occupied with Him; when our being is one continual aspiration after union with Him, and we experience the glow and rapture included in the simple word 'love,' then it cannot but be that we shall be like Him. Good!

That is what Paul meant when he said, 'Now are ye light in the Lord.' Union with Him illuminates. * The true radiance of saintly character will come in the measure in which we are in fellowship with Jesus Christ. good! Deborah's astronomy was not her strong point. The sun shines by its own light. We are planets, and are darkness in ourselves, and it is only the reflection of the central sun that ever makes us look silvery white and radiant before men. But though it be derived, it is none the less our light, if it has passed into us, as it surely will, and if it streams out from us, as it no less surely will, in the measure in which love to God dominates our whole lives.

If that is so, dear brethren, is not the shortest and the surest way to have our faces shining like that of Moses when he came down from the mountain, or like Stephen's when he 'saw the heavens opened,' to keep near Jesus Christ? It is slow work to hammer bits of ore out of the rock with a chisel and a mallet. Throw the whole mass into the furnace, and the metal will come out separated from the dross. Get up the heat, and the light, which is the consequence of the heat, will take care of itself. 'In the Lord' ye shall be 'light.'

Is Deborah's aspiration fulfilled about me? Let each of us ask that. 'As the sun when he goeth forth in his strength'—would anybody say that about my Christian character? Why not? Only because the springs have run low within is the stream low through the meadows. Only because the love is cold is the light feeble.

There is another thought here. There is power in sunlight as well as radiance. On that truth the prophetess especially lays a finger; 'as the sun when he goeth forth in his *strength*.' She did not know what we know, that solar energy is the source of all energy on this earth, and that, just as in the deepest spiritual analysis 'there is no power but of God,' so in the material region we may say that the only force is the force of the sun, which not only stimulates vegetation and brings light and warmth—as the pre-scientific prophetess knew—but in a hundred other ways, unknown to her and known to modern science, is the author of all change, the parent of all life, and the reservoir of all energy.

note

So we come to this thought: The true love of God is no weak, sentimental thing, such as narrow and sectional piety has often represented it to be, but it is a power which will invigorate the whole of a man, and make him strong and manly as well as gentle and gracious; being, indeed, the parent of all the so-called heroic and of all the so-called saintly virtues.

The sun 'goeth forth in his strength,' rushing through the heavens to the zenith. As one of the other editions of this metaphor in the Old Testament has it, 'The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more until the noontide of the day.' That light, indeed, declines, but that fact does not come into view in the metaphor of the progressive growth towards perfection of the man in whom is the all-conquering might of the true love of Jesus Christ.

Note the context of these words of our text, which

I said, presents so singular a contrast to them. It is a strange thing that so fierce a battle-chant should at the end settle down into such a sweet swan-song as this. It is a strange thing that in the same soul there should throb the delight in battle and almost the delight in murder, and these lofty thoughts. But let us learn the lesson that true love to God means hearty hatred of God's enemy, and that it will always have to be militant and sometimes stern and what people call fierce. note Amidst the amenities and sentimentalities of modern life there is much necessity for remembering that the Apostle of love was a 'son of thunder,' and that it was the lips which summoned Israel to the fight, and chanted hymns of triumph over the corpses borne down by the rushing Kishon, which also said: 'Let them that love Him be as the sun when he shineth forth in his strength.' If you love God, you will surely be a strong man as well as an emotional and affectionate Christian. good!!

That energy is to be continuous and progressive. The sun that Deborah saw day by day spring from his station in the east, and climb to his height in the heavens, and ray down his beams, has been doing that for millions of years, and it will probably keep doing it for uncounted periods still. And so the Christian man, with continuity unbroken and progressive brilliance and power, should shine 'more and more till the unsetting noontide of the day.'

III. That brings me to the last thought, which passes beyond the limits of the prophetess' vision. Here is a prophecy of which the utterer was unaware.

There is a contrast drawn in the words of our text and in those immediately preceding. 'So,' says Deborah, after the fierce description of the slaughter of Sisera—

'So let all Thine enemies perish, O Lord! but let them that love Thee be as the sun when he shineth in his strength.' She contrasts the transiency of the lives that pit themselves against God with the perpetuity that belongs to those which are in harmony with Him. The truth goes further than she probably knew; certainly further than she was thinking when she chanted these words. Let us widen them by other words which use the same metaphor, and say, 'they that be wise'—that is a shallower word than 'them that love Thee'—'they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.' Let us widen and deepen them by sacreder words still; for Jesus Christ laid hold of this old metaphor, and said, describing the time when all the enemies shall have perished, and the weeds have been flung out of the vineyard, 'Then shall the righteous shine forth like the sun, in the Kingdom of their Father,' with a brilliancy that will fill heaven with new splendours, bright beyond all that we see here amidst the thick atmosphere and mists and clouds of the present life!

Nor need we stop even there, for Jesus Christ not only laid hold of this metaphor in order to describe the eternal glory of the children of the Kingdom, but at the last time that human eyes on earth saw Him, the glorified Man Christ Jesus is thus described: 'His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.' Love always tends to likeness; and love to Christ will bring conformity with Him. The perfect love of heaven will issue in perfect and perpetual assimilation to Him. Science tells us that the light of the sun probably comes from its contraction; and that that process of contraction will go on until, at some point within the bounds of time, though far beyond the measure of our calculations, the sun himself shall die, the ineffectual beams will be paled, and there will be a black orb, with neither life nor light nor power. And then, then, and after that for ever, 'they that love Him' shall continue so be as that dead sun once was, when he went forth in his hot might.

GIDEON'S ALTAR

'Then Gideon built an altar there unto the Lord, and called it Jehovah-shalom [God is peace].'—JUDGES vi. 24.

I NEED not tell over again, less vividly, the picturesque story in this chapter, of the simple husbandman up in the hills, engaged furtively in threshing out a little wheat in some hollow in the rock where he might hide it from the keen eyes of the oppressors; and of how the angel of the Lord, unrecognised at first, appeared to him; and gradually there dawned upon his mind the suspicion of who He was who spoke. Then follow the offering, the discovery by fire, the shrinking of the man from contact with the divine, the wonderfully tranquillising and condescending assurance, cast into the form of the ordinary salutation of domestic life: 'And the Lord said unto him Peace be unto thee!'—as any man might have said to any other—'fear not! thou shalt not die.' Then Gideon piles up the unhewn stones on the hillside into a rude altar, apparently not for the purpose of offering sacrifice, but for a monument, to which is given this strange name, strange upon such warrior lips, and strange in contemplation of the fierce conflict into which he was immediately to plunge, 'the Lord is peace.'

Now I think that this name, imposed for such a reason and under such circumstances, may teach us a good many things.

I. The first thing that it seems to me to suggest is the great discovery which this man had made, and in the rapture of which he named his altar,—that the sight of God is *not* death, but life and peace.

Gideon was a plain, rude man, with no very deep religious experience. Apparently up to the moment of this vision he had been contentedly tolerating the idolatrous practices which had spread over all the country. He had heard of 'Jehovah.' It was a name, a tradition, which his fathers had told him. That was all that he knew of the God of Israel. Into this hearsay religion, as in a flash, while Gideon is busy about his threshing floor, thinking of his wheat or of the misery of his nation, there comes, all at once, this crushing conviction,—'the *hearsay* God is beside you, speaking to you! You have personal relations to Him, He is nearer you than any human being is, He is no mere Name, here He stands!'

And whenever the lightning edge of a conviction like that cuts its way through the formalisms and traditionalisms and hearsay repetitions of conventional religion, then there comes what came to Gideon, the swift thought, 'And if this be true, if I really do touch, and am touched by, that living Person whose name is Jehovah, what is to become of me? Shall I not shrivel up when His fiery finger is laid upon me? I have seen Him face to face, and I must die.'

I believe that, in the case of the vast majority of men, the first living, real apprehension of a real, living God is accompanied with a shock, and has mingled with it something of awe, and even of terror. Were there no sin there would be no fear, and pure hearts would open in silent blessedness and yield their sweetest fragrance of love and adoration, when shone on by Him, as flowers do to the kiss of the sunbeams. But, taking into account the sad and universal fact of sin, it is inevitable that men should shrink from the Light which reveals their evil, and that the consciousness of God's presence should strike a chill. It is sad that it should be so. But it is sadder still when it is not so, but when, as is sometimes the case, the sight of God produces no sense of sin, and no consciousness of discord, or foreboding of judgment. For, only through that valley of the shadow of death lies the path to the happy confidence of peace with God, and unless there has been trembling at the beginning, there will be no firm and reasonable trust afterwards.

For Gideon's terror opened the way for the gracious proclamation, which would have been needless but for it—'Peace be unto thee; fear not, thou shalt not die.'

The sight of God passes from being a fear to a joy, from being a fountain of death to a spring of life. Terror is turned to tranquil trust. The narrow and rough path of conscious unworthiness leads to the large place of happy peace. The divine word fits Gideon's condition, and corresponds to his then deepest necessity; and so he drinks it in as the thirsty ground drinks in the water; and in the rapture of the discovery that the Name, that had come down from his fathers to him, was the Name of a real Person, with whom he stood in real relationships, and those of simple friendship and pure amity, he piles up the rough stones of the place, and makes the name of his altar the echo of the divine voice. It is as if he had said with rapture of surprise, 'Then Jehovah *is* peace; which I never dreamed of before.'

Dear friends, do you know anything of such an experience? Can you build your altar, and give it this same name? Can you write upon the memorial of your experiences, 'The Lord is my peace'? Have you passed from hearsay into personal contact? Can you say, 'I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee'? Do you know the further experience expressed in the subsequent words of the same quotation: 'Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes'? And have you passed out of that stormy ocean of terror and self-condemnation into the quiet haven of trust in Him in whom we have peace with God, where your little boat lies quiet, moored for ever to the Rock of Ages, to 'Jehovah, who is Peace'?

In connection with this rapturous discovery, and to Gideon strange new thought, we may gather the lesson that peace with God will give peace in all the soul. The 'peace with God' will pass into a wider thing, the 'peace of God.' There is tranquillity in trust. There is rest in submission. There is repose in satisfied desires. When we live near Him, and have ceased from our own works, and let Him take control of us and direct us in all our ways, then the storms abate. The things that disturb us are by no means so much external as inward; and there is a charm and a fascination in the thought, 'the Lord is peace,' which stills the inward tempest, and makes us quiet, waiting upon His will and drawing in His grace. The secret of rest is to cease from self, from self as guide, from self as aim, from self as safety. And when self-will is cast out, and self-dependence is overcome, and self-reliance is sublimed into hanging upon God's hand, and when He, not mine own inclination, is my Director, and the

Arbiter of my fate, then all the fever of unrest is swept wholly out of my heart, and there is nothing left in it on which the gnawing tooth of anxiety or of care can prey. God being my peace, and I yielding myself to Him, 'in quietness and confidence' is my 'strength.' 'Thou shalt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon Thee, because he trusteth in Thee.'

II. We may look upon this inscription from another point of view, as suggesting the thought that God's peace is the best preparation for, and may be experienced in the midst of, the intensest conflict.

Remember what the purpose of this vision was,—to raise up a man to fight an almost desperate fight, no metaphorical war, but one with real sharp swords, against real strong enemies. The first blow in the campaign was to be struck that night. Gideon was being summoned by the vision, to long years of hardship and bitter warfare, and his preparation for the conflict consisted largely in the revelation to his inmost spirit that 'Jehovah is peace.' We might rather have looked for a manifestation of the divine nature as ready to go forth to battle with the raw levies of timid peasants. We should have expected the thought which inspired their captain to have been 'The Lord is a man of war,' rather than 'The Lord is peace.' But it is not so—and therein lies the deep truth that the peace of God is the best preparation for strife. It gives courage, it leaves the heart at leisure to fling all its power into the conflict, it inspires with the consciousness of a divine ally. As Paul puts it, in his picture of the fully-armed Christian soldier, the feet are 'shod with the preparedness of alacrity which is produced by the gospel of peace.' That will make us 'ready, aye ready' for the roughest march, and enable us to stand firm against the most violent charges of the enemy. There is no such preparation for the conflict of life, whether it be waged against our own inward evil, or against opposing forces without, as to have deep within the soul the settled and substantial peace of God. If we are to come out of the battle with victory sitting on our helmets, we must go into it with the Dove of God brooding in our hearts. As the Lord said to Gideon, 'Go in *this* thy might, and thou shalt save Israel, . . . have not I sent thee?'

But, besides this thought that the knowledge of Jehovah as peace fits us for strife, that hastily-reared altar with its seemingly inappropriate name, may remind us that it is possible, in the midst of the deadliest hand-to-hand grip with evil, and whilst fighting the 'good fight of faith' with the most entire self-surrender to the divine will, to bear within us, deeper than all the surface strife, that inward tranquillity which knows no disturbance, though the outward life is agitated by fierce storms. Deep in the centre of the ocean the waters lie quiet, though the wildest tempests are raging above, and the fiercest currents running. Over the tortured and plunging waters of the cataract there lies unmoving, though its particles are in perpetual flux, the bow of promise and of peace. So over all the rush and thunder of life there may stretch, radiant and many-coloured, and dyed with beauty by the very sun himself, the abiding bow of beauty, the emblem and the reality of the divine tranquillity. The Christian life is continual warfare, but in it all, 'the peace of God which passeth understanding' may 'garrison our hearts and minds.' In the inmost keep of the castle, though the storm of war may be breaking against the walls, there will be a quiet chamber where no noise of the archers can penetrate, and the shouts of the fight are never heard. Let us seek to live in the 'secret place of the Most High'; and in still communion with Him, keep our inmost souls in quiet, while we bravely front difficulties and enemies. You are to be God's warriors; see to it that on every battlefield there stands the altar 'Jehovah Shalom.'

III. Lastly, we may draw yet another lesson, and say that that altar, with its significant inscription, expressed the aim of the conflict and the hope which sustains in the fight.

Gideon was fighting for peace, and what he desired was that victory should bring tranquillity. The hope which beckoned him on, when he flung himself into his else desperate enterprise, was that God would so prosper his work that the swords might be beaten into ploughshares, and the spears into pruning hooks. Which things may stand as an allegory, and suggest to us that the Christian warfare, whilst it rests upon, and is prompted by, the revelation of God who is peace, aims in all its blows, at the conquering of that sure and settled peace which shall be broken by no rebellious outbursts of self-will, nor by any risings of passions and desires. The aim of our warfare should ever be that the peace of God may be throned in our hearts, and sit there a gentle queen. The true tranquillity of the blessed life is the prize of conflict. David, 'the man of war from his youth,' prepares the throne for Solomon, in whose reign no alarms of war are heard. If you would enter into peace, you must fight your way to it, and every step of the road must be a battle. The land of peace is won by the good fight of faith.

But Gideon's altar not only expressed his purpose in his taking up arms, but his confidence of accomplishing it, based upon the assurance that the Lord would give peace. It was a trophy erected before the fight, and built, not by arrogant presumption or frivolous under-estimate of the enemy's strength, but by humble reliance on the power of that Lord who had promised His presence, and had assured triumph. So the hope that named this altar was the hope that war meant victory, and that victory would bring peace. That hope should animate every Christian soldier. Across the dust of the conflict, the fair vision of unbroken and eternal peace should gleam before each of us, and we should renew fainting strength and revive drooping courage by many a wistful gaze.

We may realise that hope in large measure here. But its fulfilment is reserved for the land of peace which we enter by the last conflict with the last enemy.

Every Christian man's gravestone is an altar on which is written 'Our God is peace'; in token that the warrior has passed into the land where 'violence shall no more be heard, wasting, nor destruction within its borders,' but all shall be deep repose, and the unarmed, because unattacked, peace of tranquil communion with, and likeness to, 'Jehovah our Peace.'

So, dear brethren, let us pass from tradition and hearsay into personal intercourse with God, and from shrinking and doubt into the sunshine of the conviction that He is our peace. And then, with His tranquillity in our hearts let us go out, the elect apostles of the peace of God, and fight for Him, after the pattern of the Captain of our salvation, who had to conquer peace through conflict; and was 'first of all King of Righteousness, and *after that* also King of Peace.'

GIDEON'S FLEECE

'Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that Thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as Thou hast said.'—JUDGES vi. 37.

THE decisive moment had come when Gideon, with his hastily gathered raw levies, was about to plunge down to the plain to face immensely superior forces trained to warfare. No wonder that the equally untrained leader's heart beat faster. Many a soldier, who will be steadfastly brave in the actual shock of battle, has tremors and throbbings on its eve. Gideon's hand shook a little as he drew his sword.

I. Gideon's request.

His petition for a sign was not the voice of unbelief or of doubt or of presumption, but in it spoke real, though struggling faith, seeking to be confirmed. Therefore it was not regarded by God as a sin. When a 'wicked and adulterous generation asked for a sign,' no sign was given it, but when faith asks for one to help it to grasp God's hand, and to go on His warfare in His strength and as His instrument, it does not ask in vain.

Gideon's prayer was wrapped, as it were, in an enfolding promise, for it is preceded and followed by the quotation of words of the Angel of the Lord who had 'looked on him,' and said, 'Go in this thy might and save Israel from the hand of Midian: have not I sent thee?' Prayers that begin and end with 'as Thou hast spoken' are not likely to be repulsed.

II. God's answer.

God wonderfully allows Gideon to dictate the nature of the sign. He stoops to work it both ways, backwards and forwards, as it were. First the fleece is to be wet and the ground to be dry, then the fleece is to be dry and the ground wet. Miracle was a necessary accompaniment of revelation in those early days, as picture-books are of childhood. But, though we are far enough from being 'men' in Christ, yet we have not the same need for 'childish things' as Gideon and his contemporaries had. We have Christ and the Spirit, and so have a 'word made more sure' than to require signs. But still it is true that the same gracious willingness to help a tremulous faith, which carries its tremulousness to God in prayer, moves the Father's heart to-day, and that to such petitions the answer is given even before they are offered: 'Ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.' No sign that eyes can see is given, but inward whispers speak assurance and communicate the assurance which they speak.

III. The meaning of the sign.

Many explanations have been offered. The main point is that the fleece is to be made different from the soil around it. It is to be a proof of God's power to endow with characteristics not derived from, and resulting in qualities unlike, the surroundings.

Gideon had no thought of any significance beyond that. But we may allowably let the Scripture usage of the symbol of dew influence our reading into the symbol a deeper meaning than it bore to him.

God makes the fleece wet with dew, while all the threshing-floor is dry. Dew is the symbol of divine grace, of the silently formed moisture which, coming from no apparent source, freshens by night the wilted plants, and hangs in myriad drops, that twinkle into green and gold as the early sunshine strikes them, on the humblest twig. That grace is plainly not a natural product nor to be accounted for by environment. The dew of the Spirit, which God and God only, can give, can freshen our worn and drooping souls, can give joy in sorrow, can keep us from being touched by surrounding evils, and from being parched by surrounding drought, can silently 'distil' its supplies of strength according to our need into our else dry hearts.

The wet fleece on the dry ground was not only a revelation of God's power, but may be taken as a pattern of what God's soldiers must ever be. A prophet long after Gideon said: 'The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many peoples as dew from the Lord,' bringing to others the grace which they have received that they may diffuse it, and turning the dry and thirsty land where no water is into fertility, and the 'parched ground' into a 'pool.'

We have said that the main point of Gideon's petition was that the fleece should be made unlike the threshing-floor, and that that unlikeness, which could obviously not be naturally brought about, was to be to him the sure token that God was at work to produce it. The strongest demonstration that the Church can give the world of its really being God's Church is its unlikeness to the world. If it is wet with divine dew when all the threshing-floor is dry, and if, when all the floor is drenched with poisonous miasma, it is dry from the diffused and clinging malaria, the world will take knowledge of it, and some souls be set to ask how this unlikeness comes. When Haman has to say: 'There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples . . . and their laws are diverse from those of every people,' he may meditate murder, but 'many from among the people of the land' will join their ranks. Gideon may or may not have thought of the fleece as a symbol of his little host, but we may learn from it the old lesson, 'Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your minds.'

'FIT, THOUGH FEW'

'Then Jerubbaal, who is Gideon, and all the people that were with him, rose up early, and pitched beside the well of Harod: so that the host of the Midianites were on the north side of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley. 2. And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against Me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me. 3. Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand. 4. And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go. 5. So he brought down the people unto the water: and the Lord said unto Gideon, Every one that lappeth of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. 6. And the number of them that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, were three hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees to drink water. 7. And the Lord said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place. 8. So the people took victuals in their hand, and their trumpets: and he sent all the rest of Israel every man unto his tent, and retained those three hundred men. And the host of Midian was beneath him in the valley.'—JUDGES vii. 1-8.

GIDEON is the noblest of the judges. Courage, constancy, and caution are strongly marked in his character. The youngest son of an obscure family in a small tribe, he humbly shrinks from the task imposed on him,—not from cowardice or indolence, but from conscious weakness. Men who are worthy to do such work as his are never forward to begin it, nor backward in it when they are sure that it is God's will. He began his war against Midian by warring against Baal, whose worship had brought the oppressor. If any thorough deliverance from the misery which departure from God has wrought is to be effected, we must destroy the idols before we attack the spoilers. Cast out sin, and you cast out sorrow. So he first earns his new name of Jerubbaal ('Let Baal plead'), and is known as Baal's antagonist, before he blows the trumpet of revolt. The name is an omen of victory. The hand that had smitten the idol, and had not been withered, would smite Midian. Therefore that new name is used in this chapter, which tells of the preparations for the fight and its triumphant issue. From his home among the hills, he had sent the fiery cross to the three northern tribes, who had been the mainstay of Deborah's victory, and who now rallied around Gideon to the number of thirty-two thousand. The narrative shows us the two armies confronting each other on the opposite slopes of the valley of Jezreel, where it begins to dip steeply towards the Jordan. Gideon and his men are on the south side of the valley, above the fountain of Harod, or 'Trembling,' apparently so called from the confessed terror which thinned his army. The word 'is afraid,' in verse 3, comes from the same root. On the other side of the glen, not far from the site of the Philistine camp on the day of Saul's last defeat, lay the far-stretching camp of the invaders, outnumbering Israel by four to one. For seven years these Midianite marauders had paralysed Israel, and year by year had swarmed up this valley from the eastern desert, and thence by the great plain had penetrated into every corner of the land, as far south as Gaza, devouring like locusts. It is the same easy route by which, to this day, the Bedouin find their way into Palestine, whenever the weak Turkish Government is a little weaker or more corrupt than usual. Apparently, the Midianites were on their homeward march, laden with spoil, and very contemptuous of the small force across the valley, who, on their part, had not shaken off their terror of the fierce nomads who had used them as they pleased for seven years.

I. Note, as the first lesson taught here, the divinely appointed disproportion between means and end, and its purpose. Many an Israelite would look across to the long lines of black tents, and think, 'We are too few for our task'; but to God's eye they were too many, and the first necessity was to weed them out. The numbers must be so reduced that the victory shall be unmistakably God's, not theirs. The same sort of procedure, and for the same reason, runs through all God's dealings. It is illustrated in a hundred Scripture instances, and is stated most plainly by Paul in his triumphant eloquence. He revels in telling how foolish, weak, base things, that are *no* things in the world's estimate, have been chosen to cover with shame wise, strong, honoured things, which seem to be somewhat; and he gives the same reason as our lesson does, 'that no flesh should glory in His presence.' Eleven poor men on one side, and all the world on the other, made fearful odds. The more unevenly matched are the respective forces, the more plainly does the victory of the weaker demand for its explanation the intervention of God. The old sneer, that 'Providence is always on the side of the strongest battalions,' is an audacious misreading of history, and is the very opposite of the truth. It is the weak battalions which win in the long run, for the history of every good cause is the same. First, it kindles a fire in the hearts of two or three nobodies, who are burned in earlier times, and laughed at as fools, fanatics, impracticable dreamers, in later ages, but whose convictions grow till, one day, the world wakes up to find that everybody believes them, and then it 'builds the tombs of the prophets.'

Why should God desire that there shall be no mistake as to who wins the battle? The answer may very easily be so given as to make what is really a token of His love become an unlovely and repellent trait in His character. It is not eagerness for praise that moves Him, but longing that men may have the blessedness of recognising His hand fighting for them. It is for Israel's sake that He is so solicitous to deliver them from the delusion of their having won the victory. It is because He loves us, and would fain have us made restful, confident, and strong, in the assurance of His fighting for us, that He takes pains so to order the history of His Church in the world, that it is one long attestation of the omnipotence of weakness when His power flows through it. To say 'Mine own hand hath saved me,' is to lose unspeakable peace and blessing; to say 'Not I, but the grace of God in me,' is to be serene and of good cheer in the face of outnumbering foes, and sure of victory in all conflicts. Therefore God is careful to save us from self-gratulation and self-confidence.

One lesson we may learn from this thinning of the ranks; namely, that we need not be anxious to count heads, when we are sure that we are doing His work, nor even be afraid of being in a minority. Minorities are generally right when they are the apostles of new thoughts, though the minorities which cleave to some old fossil are ordinarily wrong. The prophet and his man were alone and ringed around with enemies, when he said, 'They that be with us are more than they that be with them'; and yet he was right, for the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire. Let us be sure that we are on God's side, and then let us not mind how few are in the ranks with us, nor be afraid, though the far-extended front of the enemy threatens to curl around our flanks and enclose us. The three hundred heroes had God with them, and that was enough.

II. Note the self-applied test of courage which swept away so much chaff. According to Deuteronomy xx. 8, the standing enactment was that such a proclamation as that in verse 3 should precede every battle. Much difficulty has been raised about the mention of Mount Gilead here, as the only Mount Gilead otherwise mentioned in Scripture lay to the east of Jordan. But perhaps the simplest solution is the true one,—that there was another hilly region so named on the western side. The map of the Palestine Exploration Fund attaches the name to the northern slopes of the western end of Gilboa, where Gideon was now encamped, and that is probably right. Be that as it may, the effect of the proclamation was startling. Two-thirds of the army melted away. No doubt, many who had flocked to Gideon's standard felt their valour oozing out at their finger ends, when they came close to the enemy, and saw their long array across the valley. It must have required some courage to confess being afraid, but the cowards were numerous enough to keep each other in countenance. Two out of three were panic-struck. I wonder if the proportion would be less in Christ's army to-day, if professing Christians were as frank as Gideon's men?

Why were the 'fearful' dismissed? Because fear is contagious; and, in undisciplined armies like Gideon's, panic, once started, spreads swiftly, and becomes frenzied confusion. The same thing is true in the work of the Church to-day. Who that has had much to do with guiding its operations has not groaned over the dead weight of the timid and sluggish souls, who always see difficulties and never the way to get over them? And who that has had to lead a company of Christian men has not often been ready to wish that he could sound out Gideon's proclamation, and bid the 'fearful and afraid' take away the chilling encumbrance of their presence, and leave him with thinned ranks of trusty men? Cowardice, dressed up as cautious prudence, weakens the efficiency of every regiment in Christ's army.

Another reason for getting rid of the fearful is that fear is the opposite of faith, and that therefore, where it is uppermost, the door by which God's power can enter to strengthen is closed. Not that faith must be free of all admixture of fear, but that it must subdue fear, if a man is to be God's warrior, fighting in His strength. Many a tremor would rock the hearts of the ten thousand who remained, but they so controlled their terror that it did not overcome their faith. We do not need, for our efficiency in Christ's service, complete exemption from fear, but we do need to make the psalmist's resolve ours: 'I will trust, and not be afraid.' Terror shuts the door against the entrance of the grace which makes us conquerors, and so fulfils its own forebodings; faith opens the door, and so fulfils its own confidences.

III. Note the final test. God required but few men, but He required that these should be fit. The first test had sifted out the brave and willing. The liquor was none the less, though so much froth had been blown off. As Thomas Fuller says, there were 'fewer persons, but not fewer men,' after the poltroons had disappeared. The second test, 'a purgatory of water,' as the same wise and witty author calls it, was still more stringent. The dwindled ranks were led down from their camp on the slopes to the fountain and brook which lay in the valley near the Midianites' camp. Gideon alone seems to have known that a test was to be applied there; but he did not know what it was to be till they reached the spring, and the soldiers did not know that they were determining their fate when they drank. The two ways of drinking clearly indicated a difference in the men. Those who glued their lips to the stream and swilled till they were full, were plainly more self-indulgent, less engrossed with their work, less patient of fatigue and thirst, than those who caught up enough in their curved palms to moisten their lips without stopping in their stride or breaking rank. The former test was self-applied, and consciously so. This is no less self-applied, though unconsciously. God shuts out no man from His army, but men shut themselves out; sometimes knowingly, by avowed disinclination for the warfare, sometimes unknowingly, by self-indulgent habits, which proclaim their unfitness.

The great lesson taught here is that self-restraint in the use of the world's goods is essential to all true Christian warfare. There are two ways of looking at and partaking of these. We may either 'drink for strength' or 'for drunkenness.' Life is to some men first a place for strenuous endeavour, and only secondly a place of refreshment. Such think of duty first and of water afterwards. To them, all the innocent joys and pleasures of the natural life are as brooks by the way, of which Christ's soldier should drink, mainly that he may be re-invigorated for conflict. There are others whose conception of life is a scene of enjoyment, for which work is unfortunately a necessary but disagreeable preliminary. One does not often see such a character in its pure perfection of sensualism; but plenty of approximations to it are visible, and ugly sights they are. The roots of it are in us all; and it cannot be too strongly insisted on that, unless it be subdued, we cannot enlist in Christ's army, and shall never be counted worthy to be His instruments. Such self-restraint is especially needful to be earnestly inculcated on young men and women, to whom life is opening as if it were a garden of delight, whose passions are strong, whose sense is keen, whose experience is slender, and to whom all earth's joys appeal more strongly than they do to those who have drunk of the cup, and know how bitter is its sediment. It is especially needful to be pealed into the ears of a generation like ours, in which senseless luxury, the result of wealth which has increased faster than the power of rightly using it, has attained such enormous proportions, and is threatening, in commercial communities especially, to drown all noble aspirations, and Spartan simplicity, and Christian self-devotion, in its muddy flood. Surely never was Gideon's test more wanted for the army of the Lord of hosts than it is to-day.

Such self-restraint gives double sweetness to enjoyments, which, when partaken of more freely, pall on the jaded palate. 'The full soul loatheth a honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.' The senses are kept fine-edged, and the rare holidays are sweeter because they are rare. The most refined prudence of the mere sensualist would prescribe the same regimen as the Christian moralist does. But from how different a motive! Christ calls for self-restraint that we may be fit organs for His power, and bids us endure hardness that we may be good soldiers of His. If we know anything of the true sweetness of

His fellowship and service, it will not be hard to drink sparingly of earthly fountains, when we have the river of His pleasures to drink from; nor will it be painful sacrifice to cast away imitation jewels, in order to clasp in our hands the true riches of His love and imparted life.

A BATTLE WITHOUT A SWORD

'And when Gideon was come, behold, there was a man that told a dream unto his fellow, and said, Behold, I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake of barley-bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along. 14. And his fellow answered and said, This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host. 15. And it was so, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he worshipped, and returned into the host of Israel, and said, Arise; for the Lord hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian. 16. And he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he put a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers. 17. And he said unto them, Look on me, and do likewise: and, behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be, that as I do, so shall ye do. 18. When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that are with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of all the camp, and say, The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon. 19. So Gideon, and the hundred men that were with him, came unto the outside of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch; and they had but newly set the watch: and they blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers that were in their hands. 20. And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal: and they cried, The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon. 21. And they stood every man in his place round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried, and fled. 22. And the three hundred blew the trumpets, and the Lord set every man's sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host: and the host fled to Beth-shittah in Zererath, and to the border of Abel-meholah, unto Tabbath. 23. And the men of Israel gathered themselves together out of Naphtali, and out of Asher, and out of all Manasseh, and pursued after the Midianites.'—JUDGES vii. 13-23.

To reduce thirty-two thousand to three hundred was a strange way of preparing for a fight; and, no doubt, the handful left felt some sinking of their courage when they looked on their own small number and then on the widespread Midianite host. Gideon, too, would need heartening. So the first thing to be noted is the encouragement given him. God strengthens faith when it needs strengthening, and He has many ways of doing so. Note that Gideon's visit to the Midianite camp was on 'the same night' on which his little band was left alone after the ordeal by water. How punctually to meet our need, when it begins to be felt, does God's help come! It was by God's command that he undertook the daring adventure of stealing down to the camp. We can fancy how silently he and Phurah crept down the hillside, and, with hushed breath and wary steps, lest they should stumble on and wake some sleeper, or even rouse some tethered camel, picked their way among the tents. But they had God's command and promise, and these make men brave, and turn what would else be foolhardy into prudence. He put his ear to the black camel's-hair wall of one tent, and heard what his faith could not but recognise as God's message to him.

The soldier's dream was just such as such a man would dream in such circumstances. A round loaf of barley (the commonest kind of bread) was dreamed of as rolling down from a height and upsetting '*the* tent.' The use of the definite article seems to point to some particular tent, perhaps simply the one in which the dreamer lay, or perhaps the general's; but the noun may be used as a collective, and what is meant may be that the loaf went through the camp, overturning all the tents in its way. The interpretation needed no Daniel, but the immediate explanation given, shows not only the transparency of the symbol, but the dread in the Midianite ranks of Gideon's prowess. A nameless awe, which goes far to produce the defeat it dreads, was beginning to creep over them. It finds utterance both in the dream and in its translation. The tiny loaf worked effects disproportioned to its size. A rock thundering down the hillside might have mass and momentum enough to level a line of tents, but one poor loaf to do it! Some mightier than human hand must have set it going on its career. So the soldier interprets that God had delivered the army into Gideon's hand.

This dream suggests two or three considerations. In several instances we find God speaking to those outside Israel by dreams; for example, to Pharaoh and his two officers, Nebuchadnezzar, Pilate's wife. It is the lowest form of divine communication, and, like other lower forms, is not to be looked for when the higher teaching of the Spirit of Christ is open to us all.

Again, while both dream and interpretation might be accounted for on simply natural grounds, a deeper insight into the so-called 'natural' brings us to see it as all penetrated by the operations of the ever-present God. And the coincidences which brought Gideon to just that tent among the thousands along the valley at just the moment when the two startled sleepers were talking, might well strike Gideon, as they did, as being God's own fulfilment of the promise that 'what they say' would strengthen his hands for the attack (v. 11).

Further, Gideon had already had the sign of the fleece and the dew; but God does not disdain to let him have an additional encouragement, and to let him draw confirmation of his own token from the talk of two Midianites. Faith may be buttressed by men's words, albeit its only foundation is God's.

Gideon has a place in the muster-roll of heroes of faith in Hebrews xi., and his whole conduct in this incident proves his right to stand there. 'He worshipped,' for his soul went out in trust to God, whose voice he heard through the two Midianites, and bowed in thankfulness and submissive obedience. There could be no outward worship there, with an army of sleepers close by, but the silent uplifting of confidence and desire reaches God and strengthens the man. So he went back with new assurance of victory, and roused his sleeping band.

Mark his words as another token of his faith. The Midianite interpreter had said, '*God* has delivered'; Gideon says, 'The *Lord* has delivered.' The former name is the more general, and is natural on the lips of a heathen; the latter is the covenant name, and to use it implies reliance on the Jehovah revealed by His acts to Israel. The Midianite had said that the host was delivered into Gideon's hand; he says that it is delivered into the hands of the three hundred, suppressing himself and honouring them. God's soldiers must be willing to 'esteem others better than themselves,' and to fight for God's glory, not their own. The Midianite had said, 'This is . . . the sword of Gideon'; he bid his men cry 'the sword of *the Lord, and* of Gideon.' It was God's cause for which they were contending, not his; and yet it was his, inasmuch as he was God's instrument. 'Excellent mixture,' says Thomas Fuller, 'both joined together; admirable method, God put in the first place. Where divine blessing leads up the van, and man's valour brings up the battle, must not victory needs follow in the rear?'

Gideon does not seem to have been divinely directed to the stratagem by which the Midianites were thrown into panic. He had been promised victory, but that does not lead him to idle waiting for fulfilment of the promise. 'To wait for God's performance in doing nothing is to abuse that divine providence, which will so work that it will not allow us to idle' (*Bishop Hall*).

True faith will wisely adopt means to reach promised ends, and, having used brain and hand as if all depended on ourselves, will look to Him, as if nothing depended on us, but all on Him.

There was strong faith as well as daring and skilful generalship in leading down the three hundred, with no weapons but trumpets and pitchers, to close quarters with an armed enemy so superior in numbers. And did it not need some faith, too, not only in Gideon but in God, on the part of his band, to plunge down the hill on such an errand, each man with both his hands full, and so unable to strike a blow? The other three hundred at Thermopylæ have been wept over and sung; were not these three hundred as true heroes? Let us not count heads when we are called on to take God's side. His soldiers are always in the minority, but, if He is reckoned in, the minority becomes the majority. 'They that be with us are more than they that be with them.'

One can fancy the sleepers starting up dazed by the sudden bray of the trumpets and the wild shout of that war-cry yelled from every side. As they stumbled out of their tents, without leaders, without knowledge of the numbers of their foe, and saw all around the flaring torches, and heard the trumpet-blasts, which seemed to speak of an immense attacking force, no wonder that panic shook them, and they fled. Huge mobs of undisciplined men, as Eastern armies are, and these eminently were, are especially liable to such infectious alarms; and the larger the force, the faster does panic spread, the more unmanageable does the army become, and the more fatal are the results. Each man reflects, and so increases, his neighbour's fear. 'Great armies, once struck with amazement, are like wounded whales

Give them but line enough, and the fishes will be the fishermen to catch themselves.'

So the host broke up in wild disorder, and hurried in fragments towards the Jordan fords, trampling each other down as they raced through the darkness, and each man, as he ran, dreading to feel the enemy's sword in his back next moment. 'The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous is bold as a lion.' Thus without stroke of weapon was the victory won. The battle was the Lord's.

And the story is not antiquated in substance, however the form of the contests which God's soldiers have to-day to fight has changed. Still it is true that we shall only wage war aright when we feel that it is His cause for which we contend, and His sword which wins the victory. If Gideon had put himself first in his warcry, or had put his own name only in it, the issue would have been different.

May we not also venture to apply the peculiar accoutrements of the victorious three hundred to ourselves? Christ's men have no weapons to wield but the sounding out from them, as from a trumpet, of the word of the Lord, and the light of a Christian life shining through earthen vessels. If we boldly lift up our voices in the ancient war-cry, and let that word peal forth from us, and flash the light of holy lives on a dark world, we may break the sleeper's slumbers to a glad waking, and win the noblest of victories by leading them to enlist in the army of our Captain, and to become partakers of His conquests by letting Him conquer, and thereby save them.

STRENGTH PROFANED AND LOST

'But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison-house. 22. Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven. 23. Then the lords of the Philistines gathered them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon their god, and to rejoice: for they said, Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into our hand. 24. And when the people saw him, they praised their god: for they said, Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy, and the destroyer of our country, which slew many of us. 25. And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison-house; and he made them sport; and they set him between the pillars. 26. And Samson said unto the lad that held him by the hand, Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth, that I may lean upon them. 27. Now the house was full of men and women; and all the lords of the Philistines were there; and there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport. 28. And Samson called unto the Lord, and said, O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes. 29. And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left. 30. And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life. 31. Then his brethren and all the house of his father came down, and took him, and brought him up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the buryingplace of Manoah his father. And he judged Israel twenty years.'—JUDGES xvi. 21-31.

NOBODY could be less like the ordinary idea of an Old Testament 'saint' than Samson. His gift from 'the spirit of the Lord' was simply physical strength, and it was associated with the defects of his qualities. His passions were strong, and apparently uncontrolled. He had no moral elevation or religious fervour. He led no army against the Philistines, nor seems to have had any fixed design of resisting them. He seeks a wife among them, and is ready to feast and play at riddles with them. When he does attack them, it is because he is stung by personal injuries; and it is only with his own arm that he strikes. His exploits have a mixture of grim humour and fierce hatred quite unlike anything else in Scripture, and more resembling the horse-play of Homeric or Norse heroes than the stern purpose and righteous wrath of a soldier who felt that he was God's instrument. We seem to hear his loud laughter as he ties the firebrands to the struggling jackals, or swings the jaw-bone. A strange champion for Jehovah! But we must not leave out of sight, in estimating his character, the Nazarite vow, which his parents had made before his birth, and he had endorsed all his life. That supplies the substratum which is lacking. The unshorn hair and the abstinence from wine were the signs of consecration to God, which might often fail of reaching the deepest recesses of the will and spirit, but still was real, and gave the point of contact for the divine gift of strength. Samson's strength depended on his keeping the vow, of which the outward sign was the long, matted locks; and therefore, when he let these be shorn, he voluntarily cast away his dependence on and consecration to God, and his strength ebbed from him. He had broken the conditions on which he received it, and it disappeared. So the story which connects the loss of his long hair with the loss of his superhuman power has a worthy meaning, and puts in a picturesque form an eternal truth.

We see here, first, Samson the prisoner. Milton has caught the spirit of the sad picture in verses 21 and 22, in that wonderful line,

> 'Eyeless, in Gaza, at the mill, with slaves,'

in which the clauses drop heavily like slow tears, each adding a new touch of woe. The savage manners of the times used the literal forcing out of the eyes from their sockets as the easiest way of reducing dangerous enemies to harmlessness. Pitiable as the loss was, Samson was better blind than seeing. The lust of the eye had led him astray, and the loss of his sight showed him his sin. Fetters of brass betrayed his jailers' dread of his possibly returning strength; and the menial task to which he was set was meant as a humiliation, in giving him woman's work to do, as if this were all for which the eclipsed hero was now fit. Generous enemies are merciful; the baser sort reveal their former terror by the indignities they offer to their prisoner.

In Samson we see an impersonation of Israel. Like him, the nation was strong so long as it kept the covenant of its God. Like him, it was ever prone to follow after strange loves. Its Delilahs were the gods of the heathen, in whose laps it laid its anointed head, and at whose hands it suffered the loss of its God-given strength; for, like Samson, Israel was weak when it forgot its consecration, and its punishment came from the objects of its infatuated desires. Like him, it was blinded, bound, and reduced to slavery, for all its power was held, as was his, on condition of loyalty to God. His life is as a mirror, in which the nation might see their own history reflected; and the lesson taught by the story of the captive hero, once so strong, and now so weak, is the lesson which Moses taught the nation: 'Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, by reason of the abundance of all things; therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the Lord shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things, and He shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck' (Deut. xxviii. 47, 48). The blind Samson, chained, at the mill, has a warning for us, too. That is what God's heroes come to, if once they prostitute the God-given strength to the base loves of self and the flattering world. We are strong only as we keep our hearts clear of lower loves, and lean on God alone. Delilah is most dangerous when honeyed words drop from her lips. The world's praise is more harmful than its censure. Its favours are only meant to draw the secret of our strength from us, that we may be made weak; and nothing gives the Philistines so much pleasure as the sight of God's warriors caught in their toils and robbed of power.

But Samson's misery was Samson's blessedness. The 'howbeit' of verse 22 is more than a compensation for all the wretchedness. The growth of his hair is not there mentioned as a mere natural fact, nor with the superstitious notion that his hair made him strong. God made him strong on condition of his keeping his vow of consecration. The long matted locks were the visible sign that he kept it. Their loss was the consequence of his own voluntary breach of it. So their growth was the visible token that the fault was being repaired. Chastisement wrought sorrow; and in the bondage of the prison he found freedom from the worse chains of sin, and in its darkness felt the dawning of a better light. As Bishop Hall puts it: 'His hair grew together with his repentance, and his strength with his hair.' The cruelties of the Philistines were better for him than their kindness. The world outwits itself when it presses hard on God's deserters, and thus drives them to repent. God mercifully takes care that His wandering children shall not have an easy time of it; and his chastisements, at their sharpest, are calls to us to come back to Him.

Well for those, even if in chains, who know their meaning, and yield to it.

II. We have here Samson,—the occasion of godless triumph. The worst consequence of the fall of a servant of God is that it gives occasion for God's enemies to blaspheme, and reflects discredit on Him, as if He were vanquished. Samson's capture is Dagon's glory. The strife between Philistia and Israel was, in the eyes of both combatants, a struggle between their gods; and so the men of Gaza lit their sacrificial fires and sent up their hymns to their monstrous deity as victor. What would Samson's bitter thoughts be, as the sound of the wild rejoicings reached him in his prison? And is not all this true to-day? If ever some conspicuous Christian champion falls into sin or inconsistency, how the sky is rent with shouts of malicious pleasure! What paragons of virtue worldly men become all at once! How swiftly the conclusion is drawn that all Christians are alike, and none of them any better than the non-Christian world! How much more harm the one flaw does than all the good which a life of service has done! The faults of Christians are the bulwarks of unbelief. 'The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you.' The honour of Christ is a sacred trust, and it is in the keeping of us His followers. Our sins do not only darken our own reputation, but they cloud His. Dagon's worshippers have a right to rejoice when they have Samson safe in their prison, with his eyes out.

III. We have Samson made a buffoon for drunkards. The feasts of heathenism were wild orgies, very unlike the pure joy of the sacrificial meals in Jehovah's worship. Dagon's temple was filled with a drunken crowd, whose mirth would be made more boisterous by a spice of cruelty. So, a roar of many voices calls for Samson, and this deepest degradation is not spared him. The words employed for 'make sport' seem to require that we should understand that he was not brought out to be the passive object of their gibes and drunken mockery, but was set to play the fool for their delectation. They imply that he had to dance and laugh, while three thousand gaping Philistines, any one of whom would have run for his life if he had been free, fed their hatred by the sight. Perhaps his former reputation for mirth and riddles suggested this new cruelty. Surely there is no more pathetic picture than that of the blind hero, with such thoughts as we know were seething in him, dragged out to make a Philistine holiday, and set to play the clown, while the bitterness of death was in his soul. And this is what God's soldiers come down to, when they forget Him: 'they that wasted us required of us mirth.'

Wearied with his humiliating exertions, the blind captive begs the boy who guided him to let him lean, till he can breathe again, on the pillars that held up the light roof. We need not discuss the probable architecture of Dagon's temple, of which we know nothing. Only we may notice that it is not said that there were only *two* pillars, but rather necessarily implied that there were more than two, for those against which he leaned were 'the two middle' ones. It is quite easy to understand how, if there were a row of them, knocking out the two strongest central ones would bring the whole thing down, especially when there was such a load on the flat roof. Apparently the principal people were in the best places on the ground floor, sheltered from the sun by the roof, on which the commonalty were clustered, all waiting for what their newly discovered mountebank would do next, after he had breathed himself. The pause was short, and they little dreamed of what was to follow.

IV. We have the last cry and heroic death of Samson. It is not to be supposed that his prayer was audible to the crowd, even if it were spoken aloud. It is not an elevated prayer, but is, like all the rest of his actions at their best, deeply marked with purely personal motives. The loss of his two eyes is uppermost in his mind, and he wants to be revenged for them. Instead of trying to make a lofty hero out of him, it is far better to recognise frankly the limitations of his character and the imperfections of his religion. The distance between him and the New Testament type of God's soldier measures the progress which the revelation of God's will has made, and the debt we owe to the Captain of the host for the perfect example which He has set. The defects and impurity of Samson's zeal, which yet was accepted of God, preach the precious lesson that God does not require virtues beyond the standard of the epoch of revelation at which His servants stand, and that imperfection does not make service unacceptable. If the merely human passion of vengeance throbbed fiercely in Samson's prayer, he had never heard 'Love your enemies'; and, for his epoch, the destruction of the enemies of God and Israel was duty. He was not the only soldier of God who has let personal antagonism blend with his zeal for God; and we have less excuse, if we do it, than he had.

But there is the true core of religion in the prayer. It is penitence which pleads, 'Remember me, O Lord

God!' He knows that his sin has broken the flow of loving divine thought to him, but he asks that the broken current may be renewed. Many a silent tear had fallen from Samson's blind eyes, before that prayer could have come to his lips, as he leaned on the great pillars. Clear recognition of the Source of his strength is in the prayer; if ever he had forgotten, in Delilah's lap, where it came from, he had recovered his conscious dependence amid the misery of the prison. There is humility in the prayer 'Only this once.' He feels that, after such a fall, no more of the brilliant exploits of former days are possible. They who have brought such despite on Jehovah and such honour to Dagon may be forgiven, and even restored to much of their old vigour, but they must not be judges in Israel any more. The best thing left for the penitent Samson is death.

He had been unconscious of the departure of his strength, but he seems to have felt it rushing back into his muscles; so he grasps the two pillars with his mighty hands; the crowd sees that the pause for breath is over, and prepares to watch the new feats. Perhaps we may suppose that his last words were shouted aloud, 'Let me die with the Philistines!' and before they have been rightly taken in by the mob, he sways himself backwards for a moment, and then, with one desperate forward push, brings down the two supports, and the whole thing rushes down to hideous ruin amid shrieks and curses and groans. But Samson lies quiet below the ruins, satisfied to die in such a cause.

He 'counted not his life dear' unto himself, that he might be God's instrument for God's terrible work. The last of the judges teaches us that we too, in a nobler cause, and for men's life, not their destruction, must be ready to hazard and give our lives for the great Captain, who in His death has slain more of our foes than He did in His life, and has laid it down as the law for all His army, 'He that loseth his life for My sake shall find it.'

How beautifully the quiet close of the story follows the stormy scene of the riotous assembly and the sudden destruction. The Philistines, crushed by this last blow, let the dead hero's kindred search for his body amid the chaos, and bear it reverently up from the plain to the quiet grave among the hills of Dan, where Manoah his father slept. There they lay that mighty frame to rest. It will be troubled no more by fierce passions or degrading chains. Nothing in his life became him like the leaving of it. The penitent heroism of its end makes us lenient to the flaws in its course; and we leave the last of the judges to sleep in his grave, recognising in him, with all his faults and grossness, a true soldier of God, though in strange garb.

THE BOOK OF RUTH

A GENTLE HEROINE, A GENTILE CONVERT

> 'And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: 17. Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me. 18. When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her. 19. So they two went until they came to Beth-lehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Beth-lehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi? 20. And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. 21. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me! 22. So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Beth-lehem in the beginning of barley harvest.'—RUTH i. 16-22.

THE lovely idyl of *Ruth* is in sharp contrast with the bloody and turbulent annals of *Judges*. It completes, but does not contradict, these, and happily reminds us of what we are apt to forget in reading such pages, that no times are so wild but that in them are quiet corners, green oases, all the greener for their surroundings, where life glides on in peaceful isolation from the tumult. Men and women love and work and weep and laugh, the gossips of Bethlehem talk over Naomi's return ('they said,' in verse 19, is feminine), Boaz stands among his corn, and no sounds of war disturb them. Thank God! the blackest times were not so dismal in reality as they look in history. There are clefts in the grim rock, and flowers blooming, sheltered in the clefts. The peaceful pictures of this little book, multiplied many thousand times, have to be set as a background to the lurid pictures of the *Book of Judges*.

The text begins in the middle of Naomi's remonstrance with her two daughters-in-law. We need not deal with the former part of the conversation, nor follow Orpah as she goes back to her home and her gods. She is the first in the sad series of those, 'not far from the kingdom of God,' who needed but a little more resolution at the critical moment, and, for want of it, shut themselves out from the covenant, and sank back to a world which they had half renounced.

So these two lonely widows are left, each seeking to sacrifice herself for the other. Who shall decide which was the more noble and truly womanly in her self-forgetfulness,—the elder, sadder heart, which strove to secure for the other some joy and fellowship at the price of its own deepened solitude; or the younger, which steeled itself against entreaties, and cast away friends and country for love's sweet sake? We rightly praise Ruth's vow, but we should not forget Naomi's unselfish pleading to be left to tread her weary path alone.

Ruth's passionate burst of tenderness is immortal. It has put into fitting words for all generations the deepest thoughts of loving hearts, and comes to us over all the centuries between, as warm and living as when it welled up from that gentle, heroic soul. The two strongest emotions of our nature are blended in it, and each gives a portion of its fervour—love and religion. So closely are they interwoven that it is difficult to allot to each its share in the united stream; but, without trying to determine to which of them the greater part of its volume and force is due, and while conscious of the danger of spoiling such words by comments weaker than themselves, we may seek to put into distinct form the impressions which they make.

We see in them the heroism of gentleness. Put the sweet figure of the Moabitess beside the heroes of the *Book of Judges*, and we feel the contrast. But is there anything in its pages more truly heroic than her deed, as she turned her back on the blue hills of Moab, and chose the joyless lot of the widowed companion of a widow aged and poor, in a land of strangers, the enemies of her country and its gods? It is easier far to rush on the spears of the foe, amid the whirl and excitement of battle, than to choose with open eyes so dreary a lifelong path. The gentleness of a true woman covers a courage of the patient, silent sort, which, in its meek steadfastness, is nobler than the contempt of personal danger, which is vulgarly called bravery. It is harder to endure than to strike. The supreme type of heroic, as of all, virtue is Jesus Christ, whose gentleness was the velvet glove on the iron hand of an inflexible will. Of that best kind of heroes there are few brighter examples, even in the annals of the Church which numbers its virgin martyrs by the score, than this sweet figure of Ruth, as the eager vow comes from her young lips, which had already tasted sorrow, and were ready to drink its bitterest cup at the call of duty. She may well teach us to rectify our judgments, and to recognise the quiet heroism of many a modest life of uncomplaining suffering. Her example has a special message to women, and exhorts them to see to it that, in the cultivation of the so-called womanly excellence of gentleness, they do not let it run into weakness, nor, on the other hand, aim at strength, to the loss of meekness. The yielding birch-tree, the 'lady of the woods,' bends in all its elastic branches and tossing ringlets of foliage to the wind; but it stands upright after storms that level oaks and pines. God's strength is gentle strength, and ours is likest His when it is meek and lowly, like that of the 'strong Son of God.'

Ruth's great words may suggest, too, the surrender which is the natural language of true love. Her story comes in among all these records of bloodshed and hate, like a bit of calm blue sky among piles of ragged thunder-clouds, or a breath of fresh air in the oppressive atmosphere of a slaughter-house. Even in these wild times there was still a quiet corner where love could spread his wings. The question has often been asked, what the purpose of the *Book of Ruth* is, and various answers have been given. The genealogical table at the end, showing David's descent from her, the example which it supplies of the reception of a Gentile into Israel, and other reasons for its presence in Scripture, have been alleged, and, no doubt, correctly. But the Bible is a very human book, just because it is a divine one; and surely it would be no unworthy object to enshrine in its pages a picture of the noble working of that human love which makes so much of human life. The hallowing of the family is a distinct purpose of the Old Testament, and the beautiful example which this narrative gives of the elevating influence of domestic affection entitles it to a place in the canon. How many hearts, since Ruth spoke her vow, have found in it the words that fitted their love best! How often they have been repeated by quivering lips, and heard as music by loving ears! How solemn, and even awful, is that perennial freshness of words which came hot and broken by tears, from lips that have long ago mouldered into dust! What has made them thus 'enduring for ever,' is that they express most purely the self-sacrifice which is essential to all noble love. The very inmost longing of love is to give itself away to the object beloved. It is not so much a desire to acquire as to bestow, or, rather, the antithesis of giving and receiving melts into one action which has a twofold motion,—one outwards, to give; one inwards, to receive. To love is to give one's self away, therefore all lesser givings are its food and delight; and, when Ruth threw herself on Naomi's withered breast, and sobbed out her passionate resolve, she was speaking the eternal language of love, and claiming Naomi for her own, in the very act of giving herself to Naomi. Human love should be the parent of all self-sacrificing as of all heroic virtues; and in our homes we do not live in love, as we ought, unless it leads us to the daily exercise of self-suppression and surrender, which is not felt to be loss but the natural expression of our love, which it would be a crime against it, and a pain to ourselves, to withhold. If Ruth's temper lived in our families, they would be true 'houses of God' and 'gates of heaven.'

We hear in Ruth's words also that forsaking of all things which is an essential of all true religion. We have said that it was difficult to separate, in the words, the effects of love to Naomi from those of adoption of Naomi's faith. Apparently Ruth's adhesion to the worship of Jehovah was originally due to her love for her mother-in-law. It is in order to be one with her in all things that she says, 'Thy God shall be my God.' And it was because Jehovah was Naomi's God that Ruth chose Him for hers. But whatever the origin of her faith, it was genuine and robust enough to bear the strain of casting Chemosh and the gods of Moab behind her, and setting herself with full purpose of heart to seek the Lord. Abandoning them was digging an impassable gulf between herself and all her past, with its friendships, loves, and habits. She is one of the first, and not the least noble, of the long series of those who 'suffer the loss of all things, and count them but dung, that they may win' God for their dearest treasure. We have seen how, in her, human love wrought self-sacrifice. But it was not human love alone that did it. The cord that drew her was twisted of two strands, and her love to Naomi melted into her love of Naomi's God. Blessed they who are drawn to the knowledge and love of the fountain of all love in heaven by the sweetness of the characters of His representatives in their homes, and who feel that they have learned to know God by seeing Him in dear ones, whose tenderness has revealed His, and whose gracious words have spoken of His grace! If Ruth teaches us that we must give up all, in order truly to follow the Lord, the way by which she came to her religion may teach us how great are the possibilities, and consequently the duties, of Christians to the members of their own families. If we had more elder women like Naomi, we should have more younger women like Ruth.

The self-sacrifice which is possible and blessed, even to inferior natures, at the bidding of love, is too precious to be squandered on earthly objects. Men's capacities for it, at the call of dear ones here, should be the rebuke of their grudging surrender to God. He gave the capacity that it might find its true field of operation in our relation to Him. But how much more ready we all are to give up everything for the sake of our Naomis than for His sake: and how we may be our own accusers, if the measure of our devotion to them be contrasted with the measure of our devotion to God!

Finally, we may see, in Ruth's entrance into the religion of Israel, a picture of what was intended to be the effect of Israel's relation with the Gentile world.

The household of Elimelech emigrated to Moab in a famine, and, whether that were right or wrong, they were there among heathens as Jehovah worshippers. They were meant to be missionaries, and, in Ruth's case, the purpose was fulfilled. She became the 'first-fruits of the Gentiles'; and one aim of the book, no doubt, is to show how the believing Gentile was to be incorporated into Israel. Boaz rejoices over her, and especially over her conversion, and prays, 'A full reward be given thee of Jehovah, the God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.' She is married to him, and becomes the ancestress of David, and, through him, of the Messiah. All this is a beautiful completion to the other side of the picture which the fierce fighting in Judges makes prominent, and teaches that Israel's relation to the nations around was not to be one of mere antagonism, but that they had another mission than destruction, and were set in their land, as the candlestick in the Tabernacle, that light might stream out into the darkness of the desert. The story of the Moabitess, whose blood flowed in David's veins, was a standing protest against the later narrow exclusiveness which called Gentiles 'dogs,' and prided itself on outward connection with the nation, in the exact degree in which it lost real union with the nation's God, and real understanding of the nation's mission.

We have left ourselves no space to speak of the remainder of this passage, which is of less importance. It gives us a lively picture of the stir in the little town of Bethlehem, as the two way-worn women came into it, in their strange attire, and attracting notice by travelling alone. As we have observed, 'they said,' in verse 19, is feminine. The women of the village buzzed round the strangers, as they sat in silence, perhaps by that well at the gate, of which, long after, David longed to drink. Wonder, curiosity, and possibly a spice of malice, mingle in the question, 'Is *this* Naomi?' It is heartless, at any rate; it had been better to have found them food and shelter than to have let them sit, the mark for sharp tongues. Naomi's bitter words seem to be moved partly by a sense of the coldness of the reception. She realises that she has indeed come back to a changed world, where there will be little sympathy except such as Ruth can give. It is with almost passion that she abjures her name 'Pleasant,' as a satire on her woful lot, and bids them call her 'Bitter,' as truer to fact now. The burst of sorrow is natural, as she finds herself again where she had been a wife and mother, and 'remembers happier things.' Her faith wavers, and her words almost reproach God. The exaggerations in which memory is apt to indulge colour them. 'I went out full.' She has forgotten that they 'went out' to seek for bread. She only remembers that four went away, and three sleep in Moab. Possibly she thinks of their emigration as a sin, and traces her dear ones' deaths to God's displeasure on its account. His 'testifying' against her probably means that His providence in bereaving her witnessed to His disapprobation. But, whether that be so or not, her wild words are not those of a patient sufferer, who bows to His will. But true faith may sometimes break down, and Ruth's 'trusting under the wings of Jehovah' is proof enough that, in the long years of lonely sorrow, Naomi's example had shown how peaceful and safe was the shelter there.

THE FIRST BOOK OF SAMUEL

THE CHILD PROPHET

'And the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision. 2. And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place, and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see; 3. And ere the lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep; 4. That the Lord called Samuel: and he answered, Here am I. 5. And he ran unto Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou calledst me. And he said, I called not; lie down again. And he went and lay down. 6. And the Lord called yet again, Samuel. And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And he answered, I called not, my son; lie down again. 7. Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed unto him. 8. And the Lord called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call me. And Eli perceived that the Lord had called the child. 9. Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if He call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth. So Samuel went and lay down in his place. 10. And the Lord came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for Thy servant heareth. 11. And the Lord said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. 12. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end. 13. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. 14. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.'—1 SAMUEL iii. 1-14.

THE opening words of this passage are substantially repeated from 1 Samuel ii. 11, 18. They come as a kind of refrain, contrasting the quiet, continuous growth and holy service of the child Samuel with the black narrative of Eli's riotous sons. While the hereditary priests were plunging into debauchery, and making men turn away from the Tabernacle services, Hannah's son was ministering unto the Lord, and, though no priest, was 'girt with an ephod.' This white flower blossomed on a dunghill. The continuous growth of a character, from a child serving God, and to old age walking in the same path, is the great lesson which the story of Samuel teaches us. 'The child is father of the man,' and all his long days are 'bound each to each' by true religion. There are two types of experience among God's greatest servants. Paul, made an Apostle from a persecutor, heads the one class. Timothy in the New Testament and Samuel in the Old, represent the other. An Augustine or a Bunyan is made the more earnest, humble, and whole-hearted by the remembrance of a wasted youth and of God's arresting mercy. But there are a serenity and continuity about a life which has grown up in the fear of God that have their own charm and blessing. It is well to have 'much transgression' forgiven, but it may be better to have always been 'innocent' and ignorant of it. Pardon cleanses sin, and even turns the memory of it into an ally of holiness; but traces are left on character, and, at the best, years have been squandered which do not return. Samuel is the pattern of child religion and service, to which teachers should aim that their children may be conformed. How beautifully his double obedience is expressed in the simple words! His service was 'unto the Lord,' and it was 'before Eli'; that is to say, he learned his work from the old man, and in obeying him he served God. The child's religion is largely obedience to human guides, and he serves God best by doing what he is bid,—a lesson needed in our days by both parents and children.

Samuel's peaceful service is contrasted, in the second half of the first verse, with the sad cessation of divine revelations in that dreary time of national laxity. A demoralised priesthood, an alienated people, a silent

God,—these are the outstanding features of the period when this fair life of continuous worship unfolded itself. This flower grew in a desert. The voice of God had become a tradition of the past, not an experience of the present. 'Rare' conveys the idea better than 'precious.' The intention is not to tell the estimate in which the word was held, but the infrequency of its utterance, as appears from the following parallel clause. The fact is mentioned in order to complete the picture of Samuel's 'environment,' to fling into relief against that background his service, and to prepare the way for the narrative of the beginning of an epoch of divine speech. When priests are faithless and people careless, God's voice will often sound from lowly childlike lips. The man who is to be His instrument in carrying on His work will often come from the very centre of the old order, into which he is to breathe new life, and on which he is to impress a new stamp.

The artless description of the night in the Tabernacle is broken by the more general notice of Eli's dim sight, which the Revised Version rightly throws into a parenthesis. It is somewhat marred, too, by the transposition which the Authorised Version, following some more ancient ones, has made, in order to avoid saying, as the Hebrew plainly does, that Samuel slept in the 'Temple of the Lord, where the ark was.' The picture is much more vivid and tender, if we conceive of the dim-eyed old man, lying somewhat apart; of the glimmering light, nearly extinct but still faintly burning; and of the child laid to sleep in the Tabernacle. Surely the picturesque contrast between the sanctity of the ark and the innocent sleep of childhood is meant to strike us, and to serve as connecting the place with the subsequent revelation. Childlike hearts, which thus quietly rest in the 'secret place of the Most High,' and day and night are near His ark, will not fail of hearing His voice. He sleeps secure who sleeps 'beneath the shadow of the Almighty.' May not these particulars, too, be meant to have some symbolic significance? Night hung over the nation. The spiritual eye of the priest was dim, and the order seemed growing old and decrepit, but the lamp of God had not altogether gone out; and if Eli was growing blind, Samuel was full of fresh young life. The darkest hour is that before the dawn; and that silent sanctuary, with the slumbering old half-blind priest and the expiring lamp, may stand for an emblem of the state of Israel.

The thrice-repeated and misunderstood call may yield lessons of value. We note the familiar form of the call. There is no vision, no symbol of the divine glory, such as other prophets had, but an articulate voice, so human-like that it is thought to be Eli's. Such a kind of call fitted the child's stature best. We note the swift, cheery obedience to what he supposes to be Eli's voice. He sprang up at once, and 'ran to Eli,'—a pretty picture of cheerful service, grudging not his broken sleep, which, no doubt, had often been similarly broken by similar calls. Perhaps it was in order to wait on Eli, quite as much as to tend the lamp or open the gates, that the singular arrangement was made of his sleeping in the Temple; and the reason for the previous parenthesis about Eli's blindness may have been to explain why Samuel slept near him. Where were Eli's sons? They should have been their father's attendants, and the watchers 'by night . . . in the house of the Lord'; but they were away rioting, and the care of both Temple and priest was left to a child

The old man's heart evidently went out to the boy. How tenderly he bids him lie down again! How affectionately he calls him 'my son,' as if he was already beginning to feel that this was his true successor, and not the blackguards that were breaking his heart! The two were a pair of friends: on the one side were sedulous care and swift obedience by night and by day; on the other were affection and a discernment of coming greatness, made the clearer by the bitter contrast with his own children's lives. The old and the young are good companions for one another, and often understand each other better and help each other more than either does his contemporaries.

Samuel mistook God's voice for Eli's, as we all often do. And not less often we make the converse blunder, and mistake Eli's voice for God's. It needs a very attentive ear, and a heart purged from selfishness and self-will, and ready for obedience, to know when God speaks, though men may be His mouthpieces, and when men speak, though they may call themselves His messengers. The child's mistake was venial. It is less pardonable and more dangerous when repeated by us. If we would be guarded against it, we must be continually where Samuel was, and we must not *sleep* in the Temple, but 'watch and be sober.'

Eli's perception that it was God who spoke must have had a pang in it. It is not easy for the old to recognise that the young hear God's voice more clearly than they, nor for the superior to be glad when he is passed over and new truth dawns on the inferior. But, if there were any such feeling, it is silenced with beautiful self-abnegation, and he tells the wondering child the meaning of the voice and the answer he must make. What higher service can any man do to his fellows, old or young, than to help them to discern God's call and to obey it? What nobler conception of a teacher's work is there than that? Eli heard no voice, from which we may probably conclude that, however real the voice, it was not audible to sense; but he taught Samuel to interpret and answer the voice which he heard, and thus won some share of a prophet's reward.

With what expectation in his young heart Samuel lay down again in his place! This time there is an advance in the form of the call, for only now do we read that the Lord 'came, and stood, and called' as before. A manifestation, addressed to the inward eye, accompanied that to the ear. There is no attempt at describing, nor at softening down, the frank 'anthropomorphism' of the representation, which is the less likely to mislead the more complete it is. Samuel had heard Him before; he sees Him now, and mistake is impossible. But there is no terror nor recoil from the presence. The child's simplicity saves from that, and the child's purity; for his little life had been a growing in service and 'in favour with God and man.'

The answer that came from the child's lips meant far more than the child knew. It is the answer which we are all bound to make. Let us see how deep and wide its scope is. It expresses the entire surrender of the will to the will of God. That is the secret of all peace and nobleness. There is nothing happy or great for man in this world but to love and do God's will. All else is nought. This is solid. 'The world passeth away, . . . but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.' Everything besides is show and delusion, and a life directed to it is fleeting as the cloud-wrack that sweeps across the sky, and, whether it is shone on or is black, is equally melting away. Happy the child who begins with such surrender of self to be God's instrument, and who, like Samuel, can stand up at the end and challenge men's judgment on his course!

The answer vows prompt obedience to yet undisclosed duty. God ever calls His servants to tasks which only by degrees are made known. So Paul in his conversion was bid to go into Damascus, and there learn what more he was to do. We must first put ourselves in God's hands, and then He will lead us round the turn in the road, and show us our work. We get it set for us bit by bit, but the surrender must be entire. The details of His will are revealed as we need them for the moment's guidance. Let us accept them in bulk, and stand to the acceptance in each single case! That is no obedience at all which says, 'Tell me first what you are going to bid me do, and then I will see whether I will do it.' The true spirit of filial submission says, 'I delight to do Thy will; now show me what it is.' It was a strange, long road on which Samuel put his foot when he answered this call, and he little knew where it was to lead him. But the blessing of submission is that we do not need to know. It is enough to see where to put our lifted foot. What comes next we can let God settle.

The answer supplicated further light because of present obedience. 'Speak! for Thy servant heareth,' is a plea never urged in vain. The servant's open ear is a reason for the Lord's open lips. We may be quite sure that, if we are willing to hear, He is more than willing to speak; and anything is possible rather than that His children shall be left, like ill-commanded soldiers on a battlefield, waiting for orders which never come. 'If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know.'

The sad prophecy which is committed to such apparently incongruous lips reiterates a former message by 'a man of God.' Eli was a kindly, and, in his way, good man, but wanting in firmness, and acquiescent in evil, partly, perhaps, from lack of moral courage and partly from lack of fervent religion. He is not charged with faults in his own administration of his office, but with not curbing his disreputable sons. The threatenings are directed, not against himself, but against his 'house,' who are to be removed from the high priestly office. Nothing less than a revolution is foretold. The deposition of Eli's family would shake the whole framework of society. It is to be utterly destroyed, and no sacrifice nor offering can purge it. The ulcer must have eaten deep which required such stern measures for its excision. The sin was mainly the sons'; but the guilt was largely the father's. We may learn how cruel paternal laxity is, and how fatal mischief may be done, by neglect of the plain duty of restraining children. He who tolerates evil which it is his province to suppress, is an accomplice, and the blood of the doers is red on his hands.

It was a terrible message to give to a child; but Samuel's calling was to be the guide of Israel in a period of transition, and he had to be broken early into the work, which needed severity as well as tenderness. Perhaps, too, the stern message was somewhat softened, for the poor old man, by the lips through which it came to him. All that reverent love could do, we may be sure, the young prophet would do, to lighten the heavy tidings. Secrecy would be secured, too; for Samuel, who was so unwilling to tell even Eli what the Lord had said, would tell none besides.

God calls each child in our homes as truly as He did

Samuel. From each the same obedience is asked. Each may, like the boy in the Tabernacle, grow up 'in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,' and so escape the many scars and sorrows of a life wrongly begun. Let parents see to it that they think rightly of their work, and do not content themselves with conveying information, but aim at nothing short of helping all their children to hear and lovingly to yield to the gentle call of the incarnate God!

FAITHLESSNESS AND DEFEAT

[1] And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and pitched beside Eben-ezer: and the Philistines pitched in Aphek. 2. And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel: and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines: and they slew of the army in the field about four thousand men. 3. And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us to-day before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies. 4. So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubims: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. 5. And when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again. 6. And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, What meaneth the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews? And they understood that the ark of the Lord was come into the camp. 7. And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, God is come into the camp. And they said, Woe unto us! for there hath not been such a thing heretofore. 8. Woe unto us! who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty gods? these are the gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness. 9. Be strong, and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews, as they have been to you: quit yourselves like men, and fight. 10. And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen. 11. And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain. 12. And there ran a man of Benjamin out of the army, and came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes rent, and with earth upon his head. 13. And when he came, lo, Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside watching: for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city, and told it, all the city cried out. 14. And when Eli heard the noise of the crying, he said, What meaneth the noise of this tumult? And the man came in hastily, and told Eli. 15. Now Eli was ninety and eight years old; and his eyes were dim, that he could not see. 16. And the man said unto Eli, I am he that came out of the army, and I fled to-day out of the army. And he said, What is there done, my son? 17. And the messenger answered and said, Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and

Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken. 18. And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died: for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.'—1 SAMUEL iv. 1-18.

THE first words of verse 1 are closely connected with the end of chapter iii., and complete the account of Samuel's inauguration. 'The word of the Lord' came to Samuel, and 'the word of Samuel came to all Israel.' The one clause tells of the prophet's inspiration, the other of his message and its reception by the nation. This bond of union between the clauses has been broken by the chapter division, apparently for the sake of representing the revolt against the Philistines as due to Samuel's instigation. But its being so is very doubtful. If God had sent the army into the field, He would have prepared it, by penitent return to Him, for victory, as no defeat follows on war which He commands. Probably Samuel's mission made an unwholesome ferment in minds which were quite untouched by its highest significance, and so led to a precipitate rebellion, preceded by no religious reformation, and therefore sure to fail. It was twenty years too soon (1 Sam. vii. 3). Samuel took no part in the struggle, and his name is never mentioned till, at the end of that period, he emphatically condemns all that had been done, and points the true path of deliverance, in 'return to the Lord with all your heart.' So the great lesson of this story is that when Israel fights Philistines, unbidden and unrepentant, it is sure to be beaten,—a truth with manifold wide applications.

The first disastrous defeat took place on a field, which was afterwards made memorable by a great victory, and by a name which lives still as a watchword for hope and gratitude. Happy they who at last conquer where they once failed, and in the retrospect can say, 'Hitherto the Lord helped,' both by defeat and by the victory for which defeat prepared a way! That opening struggle, bloody and grave as it was, was not decisive; for the Israelites regained their fortified camp unmolested, and held together, and kept their communications open, as appears from what followed.

Verses 3 to 5 give us a glimpse into the camp of Israel, and verses 6 to 9 into that of the Philistines. These two companion pictures are worth looking at. The two armies are very much alike, and we may say that the purpose of the picture is to show how Israel was practically heathen, taking just the same views of its relation to God which the Philistines did. Note, too, the absence of central authority 'The elders' hold a kind of council. Where were Eli the judge and Samuel the prophet? Neither had part in this war. The question of the elders was right, inasmuch as it recognised that the Lord had smitten them, but wrong inasmuch as it betrayed that they had not the faintest notion that the reason was their own moral and religious apostasy. They had not learned the A B C of their history, and of the conditions of national prosperity. They stand precisely on the Pagan level, believing in a national God, who ought to help his votaries, but from some inexplicable caprice does not; or who, perhaps, is angry at the omission of some ritual observance. What an answer they would have got if Samuel had been there! There ought to have been no need for the question, or, rather, there was need for it, and the answer ought to have been clear to them; their sin was the all-sufficient reason for their defeat. There are plenty of Christians, like these elders, who, when they find themselves beaten by the world and the devil, puzzle their brains to invent all sorts of reasons for God's smiting, except the true one,—their own departure from Him.

The remedy suggested by the united wisdom of the leaders was as heathen as the consultation which resulted in it. 'Let us send for the ark.' 'Those who regarded not the God of the ark,' says Bishop Hall, 'think themselves safe and happy in the ark of God.' They thought, with that confusion between symbol and reality which runs through all heathen worship, and makes the danger of 'images,' whether in heathenism or in sensuous Christianity, that if they brought the ark, they brought God with it. It was a kind of charm, which would help them, they hardly knew how. Its very name might have taught them better. They call it 'the ark of the covenant of the Lord'; and a covenant has two parties to it, and promises favour on conditions. If they had kept the conditions, these four thousand corpses would not have been lying stiff and stark outside the rude encampment. As they did not keep them, bringing the chest which contained the transcript of them into their midst was bringing a witness of their apostasy, not a helper of their feebleness. Repentance would have brought God. Dragging the ark thither only removed Him farther away. We need not be too hard upon these people; for the natural disposition of us all is to trust to the externals of worship, and to put a punctilious attention to these in the place of a true cleaving of heart to the God who dwells near us, and is in us and on our side, if we cling to Him with penitent love. Even God-appointed symbols become snares. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are treated by multitudes as these elders did the ark. The fewer and simpler the outward observances of worship are, the less danger is there of the poor sense-bound soul tarrying in them, instead of passing by means of them into the higher, purer air beyond.

What right had these presumptuous elders to bring the ark from Shiloh? Eli was its guardian; and he, as appears probable from his anxiety about its fate, did not approve of its removal. But 'the people' took the law into their own hands. There seems some hint that their action was presumptuous profanation, in the solemn, full title given in verse 4: 'The ark of the covenant of the Lord of Hosts which dwelleth between the cherubim,'—as if contrasting His awful majesty, His universal dominion over the armies of heaven and the embattled powers of the universe, and the dazzling light of that 'glory,' which shone in the innermost chamber of the Tabernacle, with the unanointed hands that presumed to press in thither and drag so sacred a thing into the light of common day and the tumult of the camp. Nor is the profanation lessened, but rather increased, by the priestly attendants, Eli's two sons, themselves amongst the worst men in Israel. When Hophni and Phinehas are its priests, the ark can bring no help. Heathenism separates religion from morality altogether. In it there is no connection between worship and purity, and the Old Testament religion for the first time welded these two inseparably together. That tumultuous procession from Shiloh, with these two profligates for the priests of God, and the bearers thinking that they were sure of their God's favour now, whatever their sin, shows how completely Israel had forgotten its own law, and, whilst professedly worshipping Jehovah, had really become a heathen people. The reception of the ark with that fierce shout, which echoed among the hills and was heard in the Philistines' encampment, shows the same thing. Not so should the ark have been received but with tears and confessions and silent awe. No man in all that host had ever looked upon it before. No man ought to have seen it *then*. Once a year, and not without blood sprinkled on its cover, the high priest might look on it through the cloud of incense which kept him from death, while all the people waited hushed till he came forth, but now it is dragged into the camp, and welcomed with a yell of mad delight, as a pledge of victory. What could display more strikingly the practical heathenism of the people?

Verses 6 to 9 take us into the other camp, and show us the undisguised heathens. The Philistines think just as the other side did, only, in their polytheistic way, they do not use the name 'Jehovah,' but speak first of 'God' and then of 'gods' as having arrived in the camp. The nations dreaded each other's gods, though they worshipped their own; and the Philistines believed quite as much that 'Jehovah' was the Hebrew's God, as that 'Dagon' was theirs. There was to be a duel then between the two superhuman powers. The vague reports which they had heard of the Exodus, nearly five hundred years ago, filled the Philistines with panic. They had but a confused notion of the facts of that old story, and thought that Egypt had met the ten plagues 'in the wilderness.' The blunder is very characteristic, and helps to show the accuracy of our narrative. It would not have occurred to a legend-maker. It sounds strange to us that the Philistines' belief that the Hebrews' God had come to their help should issue in exhortations to 'fight like men.' But polytheism makes that quite a natural conclusion; and there is something almost fine in the truculent boldness with which they set their teeth for a fierce struggle. They reiterate to one another the charge to 'quit themselves like men'; and while they do not hide from themselves that the question whether they are to be still masters is hanging on the coming struggle, a dash of contempt for the 'Hebrews' who had been their 'slaves' is perceptible.

According to verse 10, the Philistines appear to have begun the attack, perhaps taking the enemy by surprise. The rout this time was complete. The grim catalogue of disaster in verses 10 and 11 is strangely tragic in its dreadful, monotonous plainness, each clause adding something to the terrible story, and each linked to the preceding by a simple 'and.' The Israelites seem to have been scattered. 'They fled, every man to his tent.' The army, with little cohesion and no strong leaders, melted away. The ark was captured, and its two unworthy attendants slain. Bringing it had not brought God, then. It was but a chest of shittimwood, with two slabs of lettered stone in it,—and what help was in that? But its capture was the sign that the covenant with Israel was for the time annulled. The whole framework of the nation was disorganised. The keystone was struck out of their worship, and they had fallen, by their own sin, to the level of the nations, and even below these; for they had their gods, but Israel had turned away from their God, and He had departed from them. Superstition fancied that the presence of the ark secured to impenitent men the favour of God; but it was no superstition which saw in its absence from Shiloh His averted face.

Is there in poetry or drama a more vivid and pathetic passage than the closing verses of this narrative, which tell of the panting messenger and the old blind Eli?

'Eben-ezer' cannot have been very far from Shiloh, for the fugitive had seen the end of the fight, and reached the city before night. He came with the signs of mourning, and, as it would appear from verse 13, passed the old man at the gate without pausing, and burst into the city with his heavy tidings. One can almost hear the shrill shrieks of wrath and despair which first told Eli that something was wrong. Blind and unwieldy and heavy-hearted, he sat by the gate to which the news would first come; but yet he is the last to hear,—perhaps because all shrank from telling him, perhaps because in the confusion no one remembered him. Only after he had asked the meaning of the tumult, of which his foreboding heart and conscience told him the meaning before it was spoken, is the messenger brought to the man to whom he should have gone first. How touchingly the story pauses, even at this crisis, to paint the poor old man! A stronger word is used to describe his blindness than in 1 Samuel iii. 2, as the Revised Version shows. His fixed eyeballs were sightless now; and there he sat, dreading and longing to hear. The fugitive's account of himself is shameless in its avowal of his cowardice, and prepares Eli for the worst. But note how he speaks gently and with a certain dignity, crushing down his anxiety,—'How went the matter, my son?' Then, with no merciful circumlocution or veiling, out comes the whole dismal story once again.

Eli spoke no more. His sons' death had been the sign given him years before that the threatenings against his house should be fulfilled; but even that blow he can bear. But the capture of the ark is more than a personal sorrow, and his start of horror overbalances him, and he falls from his seat (which probably had no back to it), and dies, silent, of a broken neck and a broken heart. His forty years of judgeship ended thus. He was in many respects good and lovable, gentle, courteous, devout. His kindly treatment of Hannah, his fatherly training of Samuel, his submission to the divine message through the child, his 'trembling for the ark,' his death at the news of its being taken, all indicate a character of real sweetness and true godliness. But all was marred by a fatal lack of strong, stern resolve to tolerate no evil which he ought to suppress. Good, weak men, especially when they let foolish tenderness hinder righteous severity, bring terrible evils on themselves, their families, and their nation. It was Eli who, at bottom, was the cause of the defeat and the disasters which slew his sons and broke his own heart. Nothing is more cruel than the weak indulgence which, when men are bringing a curse on themselves by their sin, 'restrains them not.'

REPENTANCE AND VICTORY

'And the men of Kirjath-jearim came, and fetched up the ark of the Lord, and brought it into the house of Abinadab in the hill, and sanctified Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the Lord. 2. And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years: and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord. 3. And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve Him only: and He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines. 4. Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the Lord only. 5. And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the Lord. 6. And they gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before the Lord, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned against the Lord. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh. 7. And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were gathered together to Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines. 8. And the children of Israel said to Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that He will save us out of the hand of the Philistines. 9. And Samuel took a sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt-offering wholly unto the Lord: and Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; and the Lord heard him. 10. And as Samuel was offering up the burnt-offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel: but the Lord thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them; and they were smitten before Israel. 11. And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until they came under Beth-car. 12. Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.'—1 SAMUEL vii. 1-12.

THE ark had spread disaster in Philistia and Beth-shemesh, and the willingness of the men of Kirjath-jearim to receive it was a token of their devotion. They must have been in some measure free from idolatry and penetrated with reverence. The name of the city (*City of the Woods*, like our *Woodville*) suggests the situation of the little town, 'bosomed high in tufted trees,' where the ark lay for so long, apparently without sacrifices, and simply watched over by Eleazar, who was probably of the house of Aaron. Eli's family was exterminated; Shiloh seems to have been destroyed, or, at all events, forsaken; and for twenty years internal disorganisation and foreign oppression, relieved only by Samuel's growing influence, prevailed. But during these dark days a better mind was slowly appearing among the people. 'All . . . Israel lamented after the Lord.' Lost blessings are precious. God was more prized when withdrawn. Happy they to whom darkness brightens that Light which brightens all darkness! Our text gives us three main points,—the preparation for victory in repentance and return (verses 3-9); the victory (verses 10, 11); the thankful commemoration of victory (verse 12).

I. We have first the preparation for victory in repentance and return. At the time of the first fight at Eben-ezer, Israel was full of idolatry and immorality. Then their preparation for battle was the mere bringing the ark into the camp, as if it were a fetish or magic charm. That was pure heathenism, and they were idolaters in such worship of Jehovah, just as much as if they had been bowing to Baal. Many of us rely on our baptism or on churchgoing precisely in the same spirit, and are as truly pagans. Not the name of the Deity, but the spirit of the worshipper, makes the 'idolater.'

How different this second preparation! Samuel, who had never been named in the narrative of defeat, now reappears as the acknowledged prophet and, in a sense, dictator. The first requirement is to come back to the Lord 'with the whole heart,' and that return is to be practically exhibited in the complete forsaking of Baal and the Ashtoreths. 'Ye cannot serve God and mammon.' It must be 'Him only,' if it is Him at all. Real religion is exclusive, as real love is. In its very nature it is indivisible, and if given to two is accepted by neither. So there was some kind of general and perhaps public giving up of the idols, and some, though probably not the fully appointed, public service of Jehovah. If we are to have His strength infused for victory, we must cast away our idols, and come back to Him with all our hearts. The hands that would clasp Him, and be upheld by the clasp, must be emptied of trifles. To yield ourselves wholly to God is the secret of strength.

The next step was a solemn national assembly at Samuel's town of Mizpeh, situated on a conspicuous hill, north-west of Jerusalem, which still is called 'the prophet Samuel.' Sacrifices were offered, which are no part of the Mosaic ritual. A significant part of these consisted in the pouring out of water 'before the Lord,' probably as emblematic of the pouring out of soul in penitence; for it was accompanied by fasting and confession of sin. The surest way to the true victory, which is the conquest of our sins, is confessing them to God. When once we have seen any sin in its true character clearly enough to speak to Him about it, we have gone far to emancipate ourselves from it, and have quickened our consciences towards more complete intolerance of its hideousness. Confession breaks the entail of sin, and substitutes for the dreary expectation of its continuance the glad conviction of forgiveness and cleansing. It does not make a stiff fight unnecessary; for assured freedom from sin is not the easy prize of confession, but the hard-won issue of sturdy effort in God's strength. But it is like blowing the trumpet of revolt,—it gives the signal for, and itself begins, the conflict. The night before the battle should be spent, not in feasting, but in prayer and lowly shriving of our souls before the great Confessor.

The watchful Philistines seem to have had their attention attracted by the unusual stir among their turbulent subjects, and especially by this suspicious gathering at Mizpeh, and they come suddenly up the passes from their low-lying territory to disperse it. A whiff of the old terror blows across the spirits of the people, not unwholesomely; for it sets them, not to desire the outward presence of the ark, not to run from their post, but to beseech Samuel's intercession. They are afraid, but they mean to fight all the same, and, because they are afraid, they long for God's help. That is the right temper, which, if a man cherish, he will not be defeated, however many Philistines rush at him. Twenty years of slavery had naturally bred fear in them, but it is a wise fear which breeds reliance on God. Our enemy is strong, and no fault is more fatal than an underestimate of his power. If we go into battle singing, we shall probably come out of it weeping.

or never come out at all. If we begin bragging, we shall end bleeding. It is only he who looks on the advancing foe, and feels 'They are too strong for me,' who will have to say, as he watches them retreating, 'He delivered me from my strong enemy.' We should think much of our foes and little of ourselves. Such a temper will lead to caution, watchfulness, wise suspicion, vigorous strain of all our little power, and, above all, it will send us to our knees to plead with our great Captain and Advocate.

Samuel acts as priest and intercessor, offering a burnt-offering, which, like the pouring out of water, is no part of the Mosaic sacrifices. The fact is plain, but it is neither unaccountable nor large enough to warrant the sweeping inferences which have been drawn from it and its like, as to the non-existence at this period of the developed ceremonial in Leviticus. We need only remember Samuel's special office, and the seclusion in which the ark lay, to have a sufficient explanation of the cessation of the appointed worship and the substitution of such 'irregular' sacrifices. We are on surer ground when we see here the incident to which Psalm xcix. 6 refers ('Samuel among them that call upon His name. They called upon the Lord, and He answered them'), and when we learn the lesson that there is a power in intercession which we can use for one another, and which reaches its perfection in the prevailing prayer of our great High-priest, who, like Samuel and Moses, is on the mountain praying, while we fight in the plain.

II. We have next the victory on the field of the former defeat. The battle is joined on the old ground. Strategic considerations probably determined the choice as they did in the case of the many battles on the plain of Esdraelon, for instance, or on the fields of the Netherlands. Probably the armies met on some piece of level ground in one of the wadies, up which the Philistines marched to the attack. At all events, there they were, face to face once more on the old spot. On both sides might be men who had been in the former engagement. Depressing remembrances or burning eagerness to wipe out the shame would stir in those on the one side; contemptuous remembrance of the ease with which the last victory had been won would animate the other. God Himself helped them by the thunderstorm, the solemn roll of which was 'the voice of the Lord' answering Samuel's prayer. The ark had brought only defeat to the impure host; the sacrifice brings victory to the penitent army. Observe that the defeat is accomplished before 'the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh.' God scattered the enemy, and Israel had only to pursue flying foes, as they hurried in wild confusion down the pass, with the lightning flashing behind them. The same pregnant expression is used for the rout of the Philistines as for the previous one of Israel. 'They were smitten *before*,' not *by*, the victors. The true victor was God.

The story gives boundless hope of victory, even on the fields of our former defeats. We can master rooted faults of character, and overcome temptations which have often conquered us. Let no man say: 'Ah! I have been beaten so often that I may as well give up the fight altogether. Years and years I have been a slave, and everywhere I tread on old battlefields, where I have come off second-best. It will never be different. I may as well cease struggling.' However obstinate the fault, however often it has re-established its dominion and dragged us back to slavery, when we thought that we had made good our escape,—that is no reason to 'bate one jot of heart or hope.' We have every reason to hope bravely and boundlessly in the possibility of victory. True, we should rightly despair if we had only our own powers to depend on. But the grounds of our confidence lie in the inexhaustible fulness of God's Spirit, and the certain purpose of His will that we should be purified from all iniquity, as well as in the proved tendency of the principles and motives of the gospel to produce characters of perfect goodness, and, above all, in the sacrifice and intercession of our Captain on high. Since we have Christ to dwell in us, and be the seed of a new life, which will unfold into the likeness of that life from which it has sprung; since we have a perfect Example in Him who became like us in lowliness of flesh, that we might become like Him in purity of spirit; since we have a gospel which enjoins and supplies the mightiest motives for complete obedience; and since the most rooted and inveterate evils are no part of ourselves, but 'vipers' which may be 'shaken from the hand' into which they have struck their fangs, we commit faithless treason against God, His message, and ourselves, when we doubt that we shall overcome all our sins. We should not, then, go into the fight downhearted, with our banners drooping, as if defeat sat on them. The belief that we shall conquer has much to do with victory. That is true in all sorts of conflicts. So, though the whole field may be strewed with relics, eloquent of former disgrace, we may renew the struggle with confidence that the future will not always copy the past. We 'are saved by hope'; by hope we are made strong. It is the very helmet on our heads. The warfare with our own evils should be waged in the assurance that every field of our defeat shall one day see set up on it the trophy of, not our victory, but God's in us.

III. We have here the grateful commemoration of victory. Where that gray stone stands no man knows to-day, but its name lives for ever. This trophy bore no vaunts of leader's skill or soldier's bravery. One name only is associated with it. It is 'the stone of help,' and its message to succeeding generations is: 'Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.' That 'Hitherto' is the word of a mighty faith. It includes as parts of one whole the disaster no less than the victory. The Lord was helping Israel no less by sorrow and oppression than by joy and deliverance. The defeat which guided them back to Him was tender kindness and precious help. He helps us by griefs and losses, by disappointments and defeats; for whatever brings us closer to Him, and makes us feel that all our bliss and wellbeing lie in knowing and loving Him, is helpful beyond all other aid, and strength-giving above all other gifts.

Such remembrance has in it a half-uttered prayer and hope for the future. 'Hitherto' means more than it says. It looks forward as well as backward, and sees the future in the past. Memory passes into hope, and the radiance in the sky behind throws light on to our forward path. God's 'hitherto' carries 'henceforward' wrapped up in it. His past reveals the eternal principles which will mould His future acts. He has helped, therefore he will help, is no good argument concerning men; but it is valid concerning God.

The devout man's 'gratitude' is, and ought to be, 'a lively sense of favours to come.' We should never doubt but that, as good John Newton puts it, in words which bid fair to last longer than Samuel's gray stone :—

'Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review
Confirms His good pleasure to help me quite through.'

We may write that on every field of our life's conflicts, and have it engraved at last on our gravestones, where we rest in hope.

The best use of memory is to mark more plainly than it could be seen at the moment the divine help which has filled our lives. Like some track on a mountain side, it is less discernible to us, when treading it, than when we look at it from the other side of the glen. Many parts of our lives, that seemed unmarked by any consciousness of God's help while they were present, flash up into clearness when seen through the revealing light of memory, and gleam purple in it, while they looked but bare rocks as long as we were stumbling among them. It is blessed to remember, and to see everywhere God's help. We do not remember aright unless we do. The stone that commemorates our lives should bear no name but one, and this should be all that is read upon it: 'Now unto Him that kept us from falling, unto Him be glory!'

'MAKE US A KING'

'Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to Samuel, unto Ramah, 5. And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations. 6. But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the Lord. 7. And the Lord said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. 8. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken Me, and served other gods, so do they also unto thee. 9. Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them. 10. And Samuel told all the words of the Lord unto the people that asked of him a king. 11. And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen: and some shall run before his chariots.

12. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. 13. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. 14. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. 15. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. 16. And he will take your men-servants, and your maid-servants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. 17. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. 18. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the Lord will not hear you in that day. 19. Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a king over us; 20. That we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles.'—1 SAMUEL viii. 4-20.

THE office of judge was as little capable of transmission from father to son as that of prophet, so that Samuel's appointment of his sons as judges must be regarded as contrary to its true idea. It was God who made the judges, and the introduction, in however slight a degree, of the hereditary principle, was not only politically a blunder, but religiously wrong. Our narrative, like Scripture generally, pronounces no opinion on the facts it records, but its unfavourable judgment may be safely inferred from its explanation that Samuel was 'old' when he made the appointment, and that his sons were corrupt and unjust. Our text deals with the unexpectedly wide consequences of that act, in the clamour for a king.

I. Note the ill-omened request. A formal delegation of the representatives of the nation comes to Ramah, unsummoned by Samuel, with the demand for a king. There must have been much talk through Israel before the general mind could have been ascertained, and this step taken. Not a whisper of what was passing seems to have reached Samuel, and the request is flung at him in harsh language. It is not pleasant for any one, least of all for a ruler, to be told that everybody sees that he is getting old, and should provide for what is to come next. Fathers do not like to be told that their sons are disreputable, but Samuel had to hear the bitter truth. The old man was pained by it, and felt that the people were tired of him, as is plain enough from the divine words which followed, and bade him look beyond the ingratitude displayed towards himself, to that shown to God. But from the ‘practical’ point of view, there was a great deal to be said for the reasonableness and political wisdom of the elders’ suggestion. Samuel had shown that he felt the danger of leaving the nation without a leader, by his nomination of his sons, and the proposal of a king is but carrying his policy a little farther. The hereditary principle once admitted, a full-blown king was evidently the best. There were many inconveniences in the rule by judges. They had no power but that of force of personal character and the authority of an unseen Lord. They left no successors; and long intervals had elapsed, and might again elapse, between the death of one and the rise of another, during which the nation appeared to have no head to guide nor arm to defend it. Examples of strong monarchies surrounded them, and they wanted to have a centre of unity and a defender in the person of a king.

Samuel’s displeasure seems to have been mainly on the ground of the insult to himself in the proposal, and its bearing on the rule of Jehovah over the people does not seem to have occurred to him till it was pointed out by the divine voice. But, like a good and wise man, he took his perplexity and trouble to God; and there he got light. The divine judgment of the request cuts down to its hidden, and probably unconscious, motive, and shows Samuel that weariness of him was only its surface, while the true bottom of it was rejection of God. The parallel drawn with idolatry is very instructive. The two things were but diverse forms of the same sense-ridden disposition: the one being an inability to grasp the thought of the unseen God; the other, a precisely similar inability to keep on the high level of trust in an unseen defender, and obedience to an unseen monarch. They wished for a king 'to go out before them' and 'fight their battles' (v. 20). Had they forgotten Eben-ezer, and many another field, where they and their fathers had but to stand still and see the Lord fight for them?

The very same difficulty in living in quiet reliance on a power which is perceptible by no sense, besets us. We too are ever being tempted to prefer the solid security, as our foolish senses call it, of visible supports and delights, to the shadowy help of an unseen Arm. How many of us would feel safer with a good balance at our banker's than with God's promises! How many of us live as if we thought that men or women were better recipients of our love and of our trust than God! How few, even of professing Christians, really and habitually 'walk by faith, not by sight'! Do we not see ourselves in the mirror of this story? If we do not, we should. Note that the elders had, apparently, no idea that they were rejecting God in wanting a king. Samuel says nothing of the sort to them, and they could scarcely have made the request so boldly and briefly if they had been conscious that it was upsetting the very basis of their national life. Men are slow to appreciate the full force of their craving for visible good. The petitioners could plead many strong reasons, and, no doubt, fancied themselves simply taking proper precautions for the future. A great deal of unavowed and unconscious unbelief wears the mask of wise foresight. We rather pride ourselves on our prudence, when we should be ashamed of our distrust.

Note, too, that we cannot combine reliance on the seen and the unseen. Life must be moulded by one or the other. The craving for a king was the rejection of Jehovah. We must elect by which we shall live, and from which we shall draw our supreme good.

The desire to be like their neighbours was another motive with the elders. It is hard to be singular, and to foster reliance on the invisible, when all around us are dazzling examples of the success attending the other course. One of the first lessons which we have to learn, and one of the last which we have to practise, is a wholesome disregard of other people's ways. If we are to do anything worth doing, we must be content to be in a minority of one, if needful.

II. Note God's concession of the foolish wish. The divine word to Samuel throws light on the nature of prophetic inspiration. He is bidden to 'hearken to the people's voice'—a procedure directly opposite to his own ideas. This is not a case of subsequent reflection modifying first impressions, but of an authoritative voice discerned by the hearer to be not his own, contradicting his own thoughts, and leaving no room for further consideration.

Further, the granting to Israel of the king whom they desired, is but one instance of the law which is exemplified in God's dealing with nations and individuals, according to which He lets them have their own way, that they may 'be filled with their own devices.' Such experience is the best teacher, though her school fees are high. The surest way to disgust men with their own folly, is to let it work out its results,—just as boys in sweetmeat shops are allowed to eat as much as they like at first, and so get a distaste for the dainties. 'Try it, then, and see how you like it,' is not an unkind thing to say, and God often says it to us. When argument and appeals to duty and the like fail, there is nothing more to be done but to let us have our request, and find out the poison that lurked under the fair outside. The prodigal son gets his coveted portion, and is allowed to go into the far country, that he may prove how good and happy it is to starve among the swine, not because his father is angry with him, but because such experience is the only way to re-awaken his dormant love, and to make him long for the despised place in his father's house. There are some fevers of the desires which must run their course before the patient can be well again. Let us keep a careful watch over ourselves, that we entertain no wishes but such as run parallel with God's manifest will, lest He may have in His anger, which is still love, to give us our request, that we may find out our error by the bitter fruits of a granted desire.

III. Note the obstinacy that, with eyes open to the consequences, persists in its demands. Samuel is bidden to 'show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them.' He sketches, in sombre outline, the picture of an Eastern despot, the only kind of king which the world then knew. The darker features of these monarchies are not included. There is no harem, nor cruelty, nor monstrous vice, in the picture; but the diversion of labour to minister to royal pomp, the establishment of a standing army, the alienation of land to officials, heavy taxation and forced labour make up the items. To these is added (v. 18) that the royalty, now so eagerly desired, would sooner or later become a burden, and that then they or their sons would find it was easier to put on than to put off the yoke; for 'the Lord will not hear you in that day,' in reference, that is, to the removal of the king. They were exchanging an unseen King who gave all things for one who would take, and not give. A wise exchange! The consequences of our wishes are not always drawn out so clearly before us as in this instance; but we are not left in darkness as to the broad issues, and we all know enough to make our persistence in evil, after such warnings, the deepest mystery and most flagrant sin. The drunkard is not deterred by his knowledge that there is such a thing as *delirium tremens*; nor the thief, by the certainty that the officer's hand will be laid on his shoulder one day or other; nor the young profligate, by the danger that his bones shall be 'full of the sin of his youth'; nor are any of us kept from our sins, by the clear sight of their end. 'I have loved strangers, and after them will I go,' notwithstanding all knowledge of the fatal issue. Surely there is nothing sadder than that power of neglecting the most certain known result of our acts. Wilfully blind, and hurried on by lust, passion, or other impulse, like bulls which shut their eyes when they charge, we rush at our mark, and often dash ourselves to pieces on it. If a man saw the consequences of his sin at the moment of temptation, he would not do it; but this is the wonder, that he does not see them, though he knows them well enough, and that the knowledge has no power to restrain him.

IV. Note the divine purpose which uses man's sin as its instrument in advancing its designs. God had promised Israel a king (Deut. xvii. 14, etc.), and the elders may have thought that they were only asking for what was in accordance with His plan. So they were; but their motive was wrong, and so their prayer, though for what God meant to give, was wrong. In this case, as always, God uses men's sins as occasions for the furtherance of His own eternal purpose, as that profound saying has it, 'Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee.' The kingly office was a step in advance, and gave occasion to the development of Messianic expectations of the true King of Israel and of men, which would have been impossible without it. In many ways it was for the good of the nation, and the holders of the office were 'the Lord's anointed.' Modern criticism has found traces of two opposite views in this story, as compared with the passage in Deuteronomy above referred to; but surely it is a more sober, though less novel, view, to regard the whole incident as illustrating the two truths, that men may wish for right things in a wrong way, and that God uses sin as well as obedience as His instrument. No barriers can stop the march of His great purpose through the ages, any more than a bit of glass can stay a sunbeam. However the currents run and the storms howl, they carry the ship to the haven; for He holds the helm, and all winds help. The people rejected Him, and in seeking a king followed but their own earthly minds; but they prepared the way for David and David's Son. Their children long after, moved by the same spirit, shouted, 'We have no king but Cæsar!' but they prepared the throne for the true King, for whom they destined a Cross. Man's greatest sin, the rejection of the visible King of the world, brought about the firm establishment of His dominion on earth and in heaven. The cross is the great instance of the same law as is embodied in this history,—the overruling providence which bends the antagonism of men into a tool for effecting the purpose of God.

Alas for those who only thus carry on God's designs! They perish, and their work is none the less their sin, because God has used it. How much better to enter with a willing heart and a clear intelligence into sympathy with His designs, and, delighting to do His will, to share in the eternal duration of His triumphant purpose! 'The world passeth away, and the fashion thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.'

THE OLD JUDGE AND THE YOUNG KING

> 'Now the Lord had told Samuel in his ear a day before Saul came, saying, 16. To-morrow, about this time I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him to be captain over My people Israel, that he may save My people out of the hand of the Philistines: for I have looked upon My people, because their cry is come unto Me. 17. And when Samuel saw Saul, the Lord said unto him, Behold the man whom I spake to thee of! this same shall reign over My people. 18. Then Saul drew near to Samuel in the gate, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, where the seer's house is. 19. And Samuel answered Saul, and said, I am the seer: go up before me unto the high place; for ye shall eat with me to-day, and to-morrow I will let thee go, and will tell thee all that is in thine heart. 20. And as for thine asses that were lost three days ago, set not thy mind on them; for they are found. And on whom is all the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee, and on all thy father's house? 21. And Saul answered and said, Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me? 22. And Samuel took Saul and his servant, and brought them into the parlour, and made them sit in the chiefest place among them that were bidden, which were about thirty persons. 23. And Samuel said unto the cook, Bring the portion which I gave thee, of which I said unto thee, Set it by thee. 24. And the cook took up the shoulder, and that which was upon it, and set it before Saul. And Samuel said, Behold that which is left! set it before thee, and eat: for unto this time hath it been kept for thee since I said, I have invited the people. So Saul did eat with Samuel that day. 25. And when they were come down from the high place into the city, Samuel communed with Saul upon the top of the house. 26. And they arose early: and it came to pass about the spring of the day, that Samuel called Saul to the top of the house, saying, Up, that I may send thee away. And Saul arose, and they went out both of them, he and Samuel, abroad. 27. And as they were going down to the end of the city, Samuel said to Saul, Bid the servant pass on before us, (and he passed on,) but stand thou still a while, that I may shew thee the word of God.'—1 SAMUEL ix. 15-27.

BOTH the time and the place of the incidents here told are unknown. No note is given of the interval that had elapsed since the elders' deputation. All that we know is that on the previous day Samuel had had the divine communication mentioned in verse 15, and that some days are implied as spent by Saul in his quest for his father's asses. Equally uncertain is the name of the city. It was not Samuel's ordinary residence; it was in the 'land of Zuph,' an unknown district; it was perched, like most of the cities, on a hill; it had fountains lower down the slope, and a 'high place' farther up, where there was a building large enough for a feast. How strangely vivid the picture of this anonymous city is, and how we can yet see the maidens coming down to the fountains, the wearied travellers toiling up, and the voluble abundance of the directions given them!

I. The first thing we have to note is the premonitory word of the Lord. Observe the picturesque and forcible expression, 'had uncovered the ear of Samuel.' It is more than picturesque. It gives in the strongest form the fact of a revelation, both as to its origin and its secrecy. It is vain to represent the transition from judgeship to monarchy as a mere political revolution, inaugurated by Samuel as a fore-seeing statesman. It is misleading to speak of him, as Dean Stanley does, as one of the men who mediate between the old and the new. His opinions and views go for just nothing in the transaction, and he is simply God's instrument. The people's desire for the king, and God's answer to it, were equally independent of him. His own ideas were dead against the change, and at each step in bringing it about the divine causality is everything, and he is nothing but its obedient servant. It is hopeless to sift out a naturalistic explanation from the narrative, which is either supernatural or nothing. Note the three points of this communication,—God's sending Saul, the command to anoint, and the motive ascribed to God. As to the first, how striking that full-toned authoritative 'I will send' is! Think of the chain of ordinary events which brought Saul to the little city,—the wandering of a drove of asses, the failure to get on their tracks, the accident of being in the land of Zuph when he got tired of the search, the suggestion of the servant; and behind all these, and working through them, the will and hand of God, thrusting this man, all unconscious, along a path which he knew not. Our own purposes we may know, but God's we do not know. There is something awful in the thought of the issues that may spring from the smallest affairs, and we shall be bewildered and paralysed if once we get a glimpse of the complicated web which is ever being woven in the loom of time, unless we, too, can, by faith, see the Weaver, and then we shall be at rest. Call nothing trivial, and seek to be conscious of His guiding hand.

The command to Samuel to anoint Saul is no product of Samuel's own reflection, but comes to him, in this imperative form, before he has seen Saul, like a commission in blank, in regard to which he has no option, and in the origin of which he had no share. It was a piece of painful work to devolve his authority, like Aaron's having to strip off his robes before he died, and to put them on his son. But there is no trace of wounded feeling in Samuel. He is true to his childhood's word, 'Speak, for Thy servant heareth,' and, no doubt, he had the reward which obedience ever has to sweeten the bitterest draught, the reward of a quiet heart.

The reason as given in the last clause of the verse ought to have made Samuel's self-abnegation easier. God sets him the example. Israel had rejected Him, but He still calls them 'My people,' and looks upon them in tender care, and hears their cry. There is no contradiction here with the aspect of the concession to the people's wish, which appeared in the former section. Hasty criticism tries to make out discrepancies in the accounts, because it does not recognise one of the plainest characteristics of Scripture; namely, its habit of stating strongly and exclusively that side of a complicated matter which is relevant to the purpose in hand, and leaving the other sides to be presented in due time. The three accounts of the election give three different reasons for it. In chapter viii., the people put it on the ground of Samuel's age and his son's unfitness, and God treats it as national rejection of Him. Here it appears as due, on the part of the people, to their fear of the Philistines, and on the part of God to His loving yielding to their cry. In 1 Samuel xii. 12, Samuel traces it to the fear of Ammonite invasion. Are these contradictory or supplementary accounts? Certainly the latter. Though Israel had in heart rejected God, and He gave them a king that they might learn how much better they would have been without one, it is as true that He lovingly listened to the cry of their fear, and answered them, in pity and tender care, by giving them the king whom they desired, and who would deliver them from their enemies. Let us learn how patient of our faithless follies, and how full of long-suffering love, even in 'anger,' He is. The same gift of His providence, regarded in one light, is loving chastisement, and in another is loving compliance with our cry and swift help to our need in the shape that we desire, but in both aspects is good and perfect. Note, too, that God's look is active, and is the bringing of the needed aid, and that He waits for our cry before He comes with His help.

II. The meeting of Samuel and Saul. They encounter each other in the gate,—the prophet on his way to the sacrifice, the future king with his head full of his humble quest. Samuel knows Saul by divine intimation as soon as he sees him, but Saul does not know Samuel. His question indicates the noble simplicity, without attendants or trappings, of the judge's life; but it also suggests the strange isolation of these early days, and the probable indifference of Saul to religion. If he had cared much about God's rule in Israel, he could scarcely have been so ignorant as his servant's words about 'the seer,' and his failure to know him when he saw him, show Saul to have been. He had not cared to see Samuel in any of the latter's circuits, and now he only wants to get some information from a diviner about these unfortunate asses. What a contrast between the thoughts of the two, as they looked at each other! Saul begins by consulting Samuel as a magician; he ends by seeking counsel from the witch at Endor. Samuel's words are beautiful in their smothering of all personal feeling, and dignified in their authority. He at once takes command of Saul, and prepares him by half-hints for something great to come. The direction to 'go up before me' is a sign of honour. The invitation to the sacrificial feast is another. The promise to disclose his own secret thoughts to Saul may, perhaps, point to some hidden ambitions, the knowledge of which would prove Samuel's prophetic character. The assurance as to the asses answers the small immediate occasion of Saul's resort to him, and the dim hint in the last words of verse 20, rightly translated, tells him that 'all that is desirable in Israel' is for him, and for all his father's house. He went out to look for his father's asses, and he found a kingdom. The words were enigmatical; but if Saul knew of the impending revolution, they could scarcely fail to dazzle him and take away his breath. His answer is more than mere Oriental self-depreciation. Its bashful modesty contrasts sadly with the almost insane masterfulness and arrogant self-will of his later years. Fair beginnings may end ill, and those who are set in positions of influence have hard work to keep steady heads, and to sail with low sails.

III. The feast. Up at the high place was some chamber used for the feasts which followed the sacrifices. A company of thirty—or, according to another reading, of seventy—persons had been invited, and the stately young stranger from Benjamin, with his servant (a trait of the simple manners of these days), is set in the place of honour, where wondering eyes fasten on him. Attention is still more emphatically centred on him when Samuel bids 'the cook' bring a part of the sacrifice which he had been ordered to set aside. It proves to be the 'shoulder,' or 'thigh,' the priest's perquisite, and therefore probably Samuel's. To give this to another was equivalent to putting him in Samuel's place; and Samuel's words in handing it to Saul make its meaning plain. It is 'that which hath been reserved.' It has been 'kept for thee' till 'the appointed time,' and that with a view to the assembled guests. All this is in true prophetic fashion, which delighted in symbols, and these of the homeliest sort. The whole transaction expressed the transference of power to Saul, the divine reserving of the monarchy for him, and the public investiture with it, by the prophet himself. The veil was intentional, and intentionally thin. Cannot we see the flush of surprise and modesty on Saul's cheek, as he tore the pieces from the significant 'shoulder,' and hear the whispers that ran through the guest-chamber?

IV. The private colloquy. When the simple feast was over, the strangely assorted pair went down to Samuel's house, and there, on the quiet house-top, where were no curious ears, held long and earnest talk. No doubt Samuel told Saul all that was in his heart, as he had said that he would, and convinced him thereby that it was God who was speaking to him through the prophet. Nor would exhortations and warnings be wanting, which the old man's experience would be anxious to give, and the young one's modesty not unwilling to receive. Saul is a listener, not a speaker, in this unreported interview; and Samuel is in it, as throughout, the superior. The characteristic which marked the beginning of the Jewish monarchy was stamped on it till the end. The king was inferior to the prophet, and was meant to take his instructions from him when he appeared. Saul was docile on that first day, when he was half dazed with his new prospects, and wholly grateful to Samuel; but the history will show us how soon the fair promise of concord was darkened, and how fiercely he chafed at Samuel's attempted control.

One can fancy his thoughts as he lay in the starlight, on the house-top, that night, and gazed into the astounding future that had opened before him. Had there been any true religion in him, it would have been a wakeful night of prayer. But, more likely, as the event proves, the ambition and arrogance which were deep in his nature, though hitherto undeveloped, were his counsellors, and drove Samuel's wisdom out of his head.

As soon as the morning-red began to rise in the East, Samuel sent him away, to secure, as would appear, privacy in his departure. With simple courtesy the prophet accompanied his guest, and as soon as they had got down the hill beyond the last house of the city, he bids Saul send on his servant, that he may speak a last word to him alone. Our text stops before the solemn anointing, and leaves these two standing there, in the fresh morning, type of the new career opening for one of them. What a contrast in the men! The one has all his long life been true to his first vow, 'Speak, for Thy servant heareth,' and now has come, in fulness of years, and reverenced by all men, near the end of his patient, faithful service. His work is all but done, and his heart is quiet in the peace which is the best reward of loving and doing God's law. Ripened wisdom, calm trust, unhesitating submission cast a glory round the old man, who is now performing the supreme act of self-abnegation of his lifetime, and, not without a sense of relief, is laying the burden, so long and uncomplainingly borne, on the great shoulders of this young giant. The other has a humble past of a few years rapidly sinking out of his dazzled sight, and is in a whirl of emotion at the startling suddenness of his new dignity. When one thinks of Gilboa, and the desperate suicide there, how pathetic is that strong, jubilant young figure, in the morning light, below the city, as he bows his head to receive the anointing which, little as he knew it, was to prove his ruin! A life begun by obedient listening to God's voice, and continued in the same, comes at last to a blessed end, and is crowned with many goods. A life which but partially accepts God's will as its law. and rather takes counsel of its own passions and arrogant self-sufficiency, may have much that is bright and lovable at its beginning, but will steadily darken as it goes on, and will set at last in eclipse and gloom.

THE KING AFTER MAN'S HEART

'And Samuel called the people together unto the Lord to Mizpeh; 18. And said unto the children of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all kingdoms, and of them that oppressed you: 19. And ye have this day rejected your God, who Himself saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations; and ye have said unto Him, Nay, but set a king over us. Now therefore present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes, and by your thousands. 20. And when Samuel had caused all the tribes of Israel to come near, the tribe of Benjamin was taken. 21. When he had caused the tribe of Benjamin to come near by their families, the family of Matri was taken, and Saul the son of Kish was taken: and when they sought him, he could not be found. 22. Therefore they enquired of the Lord further, if the man should yet come thither. And the Lord answered, Behold, he hath hid himself among the stuff. 23. And they ran and fetched him thence: and when he stood among the people, he was higher than any of the people from his shoulders and upward. 24. And Samuel said to all the people, See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and said, God save the king. 25. Then Samuel told the people the manner of the kingdom, and wrote it in a book, and laid it up before the Lord. And Samuel sent all the people away, every man to his house. 26. And Saul also went home to Gibeah; and there went with him a band of men, whose hearts God had touched. 27. But the children of Belial said, How shall this man save us? And they despised him, and brought him no presents. But he held his peace.'—1 SAMUEL x. 17-27.

THESE verses fit on to chapter viii., chapters ix. to x. 16, being probably from another source, inserted here because the anointing of Saul, told in them, did occur between Samuel's dismissal of the people and his summoning of the national assembly which is here related. That private anointing of Saul was the divine call to him individually; the text tells of his public designation to the nation. The two are perfectly consistent, and, indeed, the private anointing is presupposed in the incident recorded in this passage, of Saul's hiding himself, for he could not have known the result that he would be 'taken,' unless he had had that previous intimation. The assembly at Mizpah was not convened in order to choose a king, but to accept God's choice, which was then to be declared.

But before the choice was announced, a last appeal was made to the people, if, perchance, they might still be persuaded to forgo their rebellious desire. It is not, indeed, said that this final, all but hopeless attempt was made by Samuel at the divine command, and we are not told that he had any further revelation than that in chapter viii. 7-9. But, no doubt, he was speaking as Jehovah's mouthpiece, and so we have here one more instance of that long-suffering divine patience and love which 'hopeth all things,' and lingers pleadingly round the alienated heart, seeking to woo it back to itself, and never ceasing to labour to avert the evil deed, till it is actually and irrevocably done. It may be said that God knew that the appeal was sure to fail, and therefore could not have made it. But is not that mysterious continuance of effort, foreknown to be futile, the very paradox of God's love? Did not Jesus give the traitor the sop, as a last token of friendship, a last appeal to his heart? And does not God still in like manner deal with us all?

Observe how He seeks to win Israel back. It is not by threatenings, but by reminders of His great benefits. He will not drive men back to His service, like a slave-driver with brandished whip, but He wishes to draw them back by 'the cords of love.' It is service from hearts melted by thankfulness, and therefore overflowing in joyful, willing obedience and grateful acts, that He desires. 'The mercies of God' should lead to men offering themselves as 'living sacrifices.'

The last appeal failed, and Samuel at once went on to give the people the desired bitter which they thought so sweet. Of course, it was by their representatives that the tribes presented themselves before God. The manner of making God's choice known is not told, and speculations as to it are idle. Probably a simple yes or no, as each tribe, family or individual was 'presented' was the mode, but how it was conveyed is quite unknown. That is a small matter; more important is it to note that Saul was chosen simply because he was the very type of the national ideal of a hero-king. Both here and in chapter ix. 2 his stature and bravery are the only qualities mentioned. What Israel wanted was a rough fighter, with physical strength, plenty of bone and muscle. About moral, intellectual or spiritual qualities they did not care, and they got the kind of king that they wanted,—the only kind that they could appreciate. The only way to teach them that one who was a head and shoulders taller than any of them was not thereby certified to be the ideal king, was to give them such a man, and let them see what good he would do them.

There is no surer index nor sharper test of national or individual character than the sort of 'heroes' they worship. *Vox populi* has not been very much refined since Saul's day. Athletes and soldiers still captivate the crowd, and a mere prophet like Samuel has no chance beside the man of broad shoulders and well-developed biceps. And very often communities, especially democratic ones, get the 'king' they desire, the leader, statesman or the like, who comes near their ideal. The man whom they choose is the man whom, generally, they deserve. Israel had an excuse for its burst of ardour for a soldier, for it was in deadly danger from the Philistines. Is there as good an excuse for us in Britain, in our recent adoration of successful generals? Israel found out that its idol lacked higher gifts than thews and sinews, and experience taught them the falseness of their ideal.

Saul's hiding among the piles of miscellaneous baggage, which the multitude of representatives had brought with them, is usually set down to his credit, as indicating an engaging modesty; but there is another and more probable explanation of it, less creditable to him. Was it not rather occasioned by his shrinking from the heavy task that God was laying on him? He was not being summoned to a secure throne, but to 'go out before us, and fight our battles.' He might well shrink, but if he had been God-fearing and God-obeying and God-trusting, he would have cried, 'Here am I! send me,' instead of skulking among the stuff. There was another Saul, who could say, 'I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.' It had been better for the son of Kish if he had been like the young Pharisee from Tarsus. We too have divine calls in *our* lives, and alas! we too not seldom hide ourselves among the stuff, and try to avoid taking up some heavy duty, by absorbing our minds in material good. Few things have greater power of obscuring 'the heavenly vision,' and of rendering us unwilling to obey it, than the clinging to the things of this world, which are in their place as the traveller's luggage needful on the road, but very much out of their place when they become a hiding-place for a man whom God is calling to service.

The 'manner of the kingdom,' which Samuel wrote and laid up before the Lord, was probably not the same as 'the manner of the king' (chapter viii. 9-18), but a kind of constitution, or solemn statement of the principles which were to govern the monarchy. The reading in verse 26 should probably be 'the men of valour,' instead of 'a band of men.' They were brave men, 'whose hearts God had touched.' Now that Saul was chosen by God, loyalty to God was shown by loyalty to Saul. The sin of the people's desire, and the drop from the high ideal of the theocracy, and the lack of lofty qualities in Saul, may all be admitted. But God has made him king, and that is enough. Henceforward, God's servants will be Saul's partisans. The malcontents were apparently but a small faction. They, perhaps, had had a candidate of their own, but, at all events, they criticised God's appointed deliverer, and saw nothing in him to warrant the expectation that he would be able to do much for Israel. Disparaging criticism of God's chosen instruments comes from distrust of God who chose them. To doubt *the* divinely sent Deliverer's power to 'save' is to accuse God of not knowing our needs and of miscalculating the power of His supply of them. But not a few of us put that same question in various tones of incredulity, scorn or indifference. Sense makes many mistakes when it takes to trying to weigh Christ in its vulgar balances, and to settling whether He looks like a Saviour and a King.

SAMUEL'S CHALLENGE AND CHARGE

1 And Samuel said unto all Israel, Behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a king over you. 2. And now, behold, the king walketh before you: and I am old and grayheaded; and, behold, my sons are with you: and I have walked before you from my childhood unto this day. 3. Behold, here I am: witness against me before the Lord, and before His anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you. 4. And they said, Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand. 5. And he said unto them, The Lord is witness against you, and His anointed is witness this day, that ye have not found ought in my hand. And they answered, He is witness. 6. And Samuel said unto the people, It is the Lord that advanced Moses and Aaron, and that brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt. 7. Now therefore stand still, that I may reason with you before the Lord of all the righteous acts of the Lord, which he did to you and to your fathers. 8. When Jacob was come into Egypt, and your fathers cried unto the Lord, then the Lord

sent Moses and Aaron, which brought forth your fathers out of Egypt, and made them dwell in this place. 9. And when they forgat the Lord their God, He sold them into the hand of Sisera, captain of the host of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab, and they fought against them. 10. And they cried unto the Lord, and said, We have sinned, because we have forsaken the Lord, and have served Baalim and Ashtaroth: but now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, and we will serve Thee. 11. And the Lord sent Jerubbaal, and Bedan, and Jephthah, and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and ye dwelled safe. 12. And when ye saw that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon came against you, ye said unto me, Nay; but a king shall reign over us: when the Lord your God was your king. 13. Now therefore behold the king whom ye have chosen, and whom ye have desired! and, behold, the Lord hath set a king over you. 14. If ye will fear the Lord, and serve Him, and obey His voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the Lord your God: 15. But if ye will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall the hand of the Lord be against you, as it was against your fathers.'—1 SAMUEL xii. 1-15.

THE portion of Samuel's address included in this passage has three main sections: his noble and dignified assertion of his official purity, his summary of the past history, and his solemn declaration of the conditions of future wellbeing for the nation with its new king.

I. Probably the war with the Ammonite king Nahash, which had postponed the formal inauguration of the king, had been carried on in the neighbourhood of the Jordan valley; and thus Gilgal would be a convenient rendezvous. But it was chosen for other reasons also, and, as appears from 1 Samuel x. 8, had been fixed on by Samuel at his first interview with Saul. There the Covenant had been renewed, after the wanderers had crossed the river, with Joshua at their head, and it was fitting that the beginnings of the new form of the national life should be consecrated by worship on the same site as had witnessed the beginnings of the national life on the soil of the promised land. Perhaps the silent stones, which Joshua reared, stood there yet. At all events, sacred memories could scarcely fail, as the rejoicing crowd, standing where their fathers had renewed the Covenant, saw the blackened ruins of Jericho, and the foaming river, now, as then, filling all its banks in the time of harvest, which their fathers had crossed with the ark, that was now hidden at Kirjath-jearim, for their guide. The very place spoke the same lessons from the past which Samuel was about to teach them.

There is just a faint trace of Samuel's disapproval of the new order in his first words. He takes care to throw the whole responsibility on the people; but, at the same time, he assumes the authoritative tone which becomes him, and quietly takes the position of superiority to the king whom he has made. 1 Samuel xi. 15 seems to imply that he took no part in the rejoicings. It was 'Saul and all the men of Israel' who were so glad. He was still hesitant as to the issue, and obeyed the divine command with clearer insight into its purpose than the shouting crowd and the proud young king had. There is something very pathetic in the contrast he draws between Saul and himself. 'The king walketh before you,' in all the vigour of his young activity, and delighting all your eyes, and 'I am old and gray-headed,' feeble, and fit for little more work, and therefore, as happens to such worn-out public servants, cast aside for a new man. Samuel was not a monster of perfection without human feelings. His sense of Israel's ingratitude to himself and practical revolt from God lay together in his mind, and colour this whole speech, which has a certain tone of severity, and an absence of all congratulation. Probably that accounts for the mention of his sons. The elders' frank statement of their low opinion of them had been a sore point with Samuel, and he cannot help alluding to it. It was not for want of possible successors in his own house that they had cried out for a king. If this be not the bearing of the allusion to his sons, it is difficult to explain; and this obvious explanation would never have been overlooked if Samuel had not been idealised into a faultless saint. The dash of human infirmity and fatherly blindness gives reality to the picture. 'I have walked before you from my youth unto this day.' Note the recurrence of the same expression as is applied to Saul in the former part of the verse. It is as if he had said, 'Once I was as he is now,—young and active in your sight, and for your service. Remember these past years. May your new fancy's record be as stainless as mine is, when he is old and grayheaded!' The words bring into view the characteristic of Samuel's life which is often insisted on in the earlier chapters,—its calm, unbroken continuity and uniformity of direction, from the long-past days when he wore 'the little coat' his mother made him, with so many tears dropped on it, till this closing hour. While everything was rushing down to destruction in Eli's time, and his sons were rioting at the Tabernacle door, the child was growing up in the stillness; and from then till now, amid all changes, his course had been steady, and pointed to one aim. Blessed they whose age is but the fruitage of the promise of their youth! Blessed they who begin as 'little children,' with the forgiveness of sin and the knowledge of the Father, and who go on, as 'young men,' to overcome the Evil One, and end, as 'fathers,' with the deeper knowledge of Him who is 'from the beginning,' which is the reward of childhood's trust and manhood's struggles!

Samuel is still a prophet, but he is ceasing to be the sole authority, and, in his conscious integrity, calls for a public, full discharge, in the presence of the king. Note that verse 3 gives the first instance of the use of the name 'Messiah,' and think of the contrast between Saul and Jesus. Observe, too, the simple manners of these times, when 'ox and ass' were the wealth. They would be poor plunder nowadays. Note also the various forms of injustice of which he challenges any one to convict him. Forcible seizure of live stock, fraud, harsh oppression, and letting suitors put gold on his eyes that he might not see, are the vices of the Eastern ruler to-day, and rampant in that unhappy land, as they have been ever since Samuel's time. I think I have heard of politicians in some other countries further west than Gilgal, who have axes to grind and logs to roll, and of the wonderful effects, in many places of business, of certain circular gold discs applied to the eyes. This man went away a poor man. He does not seem to have had salary, or retiring pension; but he carried away a pair of clean hands, as the voice of a nation witnessed.

II. Having cleared himself, Samuel recounts the outlines of the past, in order to emphasise the law that cleaving to God had ever brought deliverance; departure, disaster; and penitence, restoration. It is history with a purpose, and less careful about chronology than principles. Facts are good, if illuminated by the clear recognition of the law which they obey; but, without that, they are lumber. The 'philosophy of history' is not reached without the plain recognition of the working of the divine will. No doubt the principles which Samuel discerned written as with a sunbeam on the past of Israel were illustrated there with a certainty and directness which belonged to it alone; but we shall make a bad use of the history of Israel, if we say, 'It is all miraculous, and therefore inapplicable to modern national life.' It would be much nearer the mark to say, 'It is all miraculous, and therefore meant as an exhibition for blind eyes of the eternal principles which govern the history of all nations.' It is as true in Britain to-day as ever it was in Judea, that righteousness and the fear of God are the sure foundations of real national as of individual prosperity. The kingdoms of this world are not the devil's, though diplomatists and soldiers seem to think so. If any nation were to live universally by the laws of God, it might not have what the world calls national success; it would have no story of wholesale robbery, called military glory, but it would have peace within its borders, and life would go nobly and sweetly there. 'Happy is the people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is the people, whose God is the Lord.'

The details of Samuel's *résumé* need not occupy much time. Note the word in verse 7, 'reason,' or, as the Revised Version renders, 'plead.' He takes the position of God's advocate in the suit, and what he will prove for his client is the 'righteousness' of his dealings in the past. The story, says he, can be brought down to very simple elements,—a cry to God, an answer of deliverance, a relapse, punishment, a renewed cry to God, and all the rest of the series as before. It is like a repeating decimal, over and over again, each figure drawing the next after it. The list of oppressors in verse 9, and that of deliverers in verse 11, do not follow the same order, but that matters nothing. Clearly the facts are assumed as well known, and needing only summary reference. The new-fashioned way of treating Biblical history, of course, takes that as an irrefutable proof of the late date and spuriousness of this manufactured speech put into Samuel's mouth. Less omniscient students will be content with accepting the witness to the history. Nobody knows anything of a judge named Bedan, and the conjectural emendation 'Barak' is probable, especially remembering the roll-call in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where Gideon, Barak, and Jephthah appear in the same order, with the addition of Samson. The supposition that 'Samuel,' in this verse, is an error for 'Samson,' is unnecessary; for the prophet's mention of himself thus is not unnatural, in the circumstances, and is less obtrusive than to have said 'me.'

The retrospect here given points the lesson of the sin and folly of the demand for a king. The old way had been to cry to God in their distresses, and the old experience had been that the answer came swift and sufficient; but this generation had tried a new method, and fear of 'Nahash the Ammonite' had driven them to look for a man to help them. The experience of God's responses to prayer does not always wean even those who receive them from casting about for visible helpers. Still less does the experience of our predecessors keep us from it. Strange that after a hundred plain instances of His aid, the hundred and first distress should find us almost as slow to turn to Him, and as eager to secure earthly stays, as if there were no past of our own, or of many generations, all crowded and bright with tokens of His care! We are always disposed to doubt whether the power that delivered from Sisera, Philistines, and Moab, will be able to deliver us from Nahash. The new danger looks the very worst of all, and this time we must have a king. All the while Israel had God for its king. Our dim eyes cannot see the realities of the invisible world, and so we cleave to the illusions of the visible, which, at their best, are but shadows of the real, and are often made, by our weak hearts, its rival and substitute. What does the soldier, who has an impenetrable armour to wear, want with pasteboard imitations, like those worn in a play? It is doubtful wisdom to fling away the substance in grasping at the shadow. Saul was brave, and a head and shoulders above the people, and he had beaten Nahash for them; but Saul for God is a poor exchange. Do we do better, when we hanker after something more tangible than an unseen Guide, Helper, Stay, Joy, and Peace-bringer for our hearts, and declare plainly, by our eager race after created good, that we do not reckon God by Himself enough for us?

III. The part of Samuel's address with which we are concerned here closes with the application of the history to the present time. The great point of the last three verses is that the new order of things has not changed the old law, which bound up well-being inseparably with obedience. They have got their king, and there he stands; but if they thin [illegible] at that is to secure their prosperity, they are much mistaken. There is a touch of rebuke, and possibly of sarcasm, in pointing to Saul, and making so emphatic, as in verse 13, the vehemence of their anxiety to get him. It is almost as if Samuel had said, 'Look at him, and say whether he is worth all that eagerness. Do you like him as well, now that you have him, as you did before?' There are not many of this world's goods which stand that test. The shell that looked silvery and iridescent when in the sea is but a poor, pale reminder of its former self, when we hold it dry in our hands. One object of desire, and only one, brings no disappointment in possessing it. He, and only he, who sets his hope on God, will never have to feel that he is not so satisfied with the fulfilment as with the dream.

Israel had rejected God in demanding a king; but the giver of their demand had been God, and their rejection had not abolished the divine government, nor altered one jot of the old law. They and their king were equally its subjects. There is great emphasis in the special mention of 'your king' as bound to obedience as much as they; and, if we follow the Septuagint reading of verse 15, the mention is repeated there in the threatening of punishment. No abundance of earthly supports or objects of our love or trust in the least alters the unalterable conditions of well-being. Whether surrounded with these or stripped of all, to fear and serve the Lord and to hearken to His voice is equally the requisite for all true blessedness, and is so equally to the helper and the helped, the lover and the loved. We are ever tempted to think that, when our wishes are granted, and some dear or strong hand is stretched out for aid, all will be well; and we are terribly apt to forget that we need God as much as before, and that the way of being blessed has not changed. Those whose hearts and homes are bright with loved faces, and whose lives are guarded by strong and wise hands, have need to remember that they and their dear ones are under the same conditions of well-being as are the loneliest and saddest; and they who 'have none other that fighteth for' them have no less need to remember that, if God be their companion, they cannot be utterly solitary, nor altogether helpless if He be their aid.

OLD TRUTH FOR A NEW EPOCH

'Now therefore behold the king whom ye have chosen, and whom ye have desired! and, behold, the Lord hath set a king over you. 14. If ye will fear the Lord, and serve Him, and obey His voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord; then shall both ye, and also the king that reigneth over you, continue following the Lord your God: 15. But if ye will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord; then shall the hand of the Lord be against you, as it was against your fathers. 16. Now therefore stand and see this great thing, which the Lord will do before your eyes. 17. Is it not wheat-harvest

to-day? I will call unto the Lord, and He shall send thunder and rain: that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking you a king. 18. So Samuel called unto the Lord; and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day: and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel. 19. And all the people said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king. 20. And Samuel said unto the people, Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart; 21. And turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver, for they are vain. 22. For the Lord will not forsake His people for His great name's sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you His people. 23. Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way: 24. Only fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things He hath done for you. 25. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king.'—1 SAMUEL xii. 13-25.

SAMUEL'S office as judge necessarily ended when Saul was made king, but his office of prophet continued. This chapter deals with both the cessation and the continuance, giving at first his dignified, and somewhat pained, vindication of his integrity, and then passing on to show him exercising his prophetic function in exhortation, miracle, and authoritative declaration of Jehovah's will.

I. The first point is the sign which Samuel gave. Usually there is no rain in Palestine from about the end of April till October. Samuel was speaking during the wheat harvest, which falls about the beginning of June. We note that he volunteered the sign, and, what is still more remarkable, that he is sure that God will send it in answer to his prayer. Why was he thus certain? Because he recognised that the impulse to proffer the sign came from God. We know little of the mental processes by which a prophet could discriminate between his own thinkings and God's speech, but such discrimination was possible, or there could have been no ring of confidence in the prophet's 'Thus saith the Lord.' Not even a 'Samuel among them that call upon His name' had a right to assume that every asking would certainly have an answer. It is when we ask 'anything according to His will' that we know that 'He heareth us,' and are entitled to predict to others the sure answer.

It seems a long leap logically from hearing the thunder and seeing the rain rushing down on the harvest field, to recognising the sin of asking for a king. But the connecting steps are plain. Samuel announced the storm, he asked God to send it, it came at his word; therefore he was approved of God and was His messenger; therefore his words about the desire for a king were God's words. Again, God sent the tempest; therefore God ruled the elemental powers, and wielded them so as to affect Israel, and therefore it had been folly and sin to wish for another defender. So the result of the thunder-burst was twofold—they 'feared Jehovah and Samuel,' and they confessed their sin in desiring a king. They were but rude and sense-bound men, like children in many respects; their religion was little more than outward worship and a vague awe; they needed 'signs' as children need picture-books. The very slightness and superficiality of their religion made their confession easy and swift, and neither the one nor the other went deep enough to be lasting. The faith that is built on 'signs and wonders' is easily battered down; the repentance that is due to a thunderstorm is over as soon as the sun comes out again. The shallowness of the contrition in this case is shown by two things,—the request to Samuel to pray for them, and the boon which they begged him to ask, 'that we die not.' They had better have prayed for themselves, and they had better have asked for strength to cleave to Jehovah. They were like Simon Magus cowering before Peter, and beseeching him, 'Pray ye for me to the Lord, that none of the things which ye have spoken may come upon me.' That is not the voice of true repentance, the 'godly sorrow' which works healing and life, but that of the 'sorrow of the world which worketh death.' The real penitent will press the closer to the forgiving Father, and his cry will be for purity even more than for pardon.

II. Samuel's closing words are tender, wise, and full of great truths. He begins with encouragement blended with reiteration of the people's sin. It is not safe for a forgiven man to forget his sin quickly. The more sure he is that God has forgotten, the more careful he should be to remember it, for gratitude, humility and watchfulness. But it should never loom so large before him as to shut out the sunshine of God's love, for no fruits of goodness will ripen in character without that light. It is a great piece of practical wisdom always to keep one's forgiven sin in mind, and yet not to let it paralyse hopefulness and effort. 'Ye have indeed done all this evil, . . . yet turn not aside from following Jehovah.' That is a truly evangelical exhortation. The memory of past failures is never to set the tune for future service. Again, Samuel based the exhortation to whole-hearted service of Jehovah on Jehovah's faithfulness and great benefits (vs. 22-24). It is suicidal folly to turn away from Him who never turns away from us; it is black ingratitude, as well as suicidal folly, to refuse to serve Him whose mercies encompass us. That divine good pleasure, which has no source but in Himself, flows out like an artesian well, unceasing. His 'nature and property' is to love. His past is the prophecy of His future. He will always be what He has been, and always do what He has done. Therefore we need not fear, though we change and are faithless. 'He cannot deny Himself.' His revealed character would be dimmed if He abandoned a soul that clung to Him. So our faith should, in some measure, match His faithfulness, and we should build firmly on the firm foundation.

III. Samuel answers the people's request for his prayers with a wise word, full of affection, and also full of dignity and warning, all the more impressive because veiled. He promises his continued intercession, but he puts it as a duty which he owes to God rather than to them only, and he thus sufficiently asserts his God-appointed office. He promises to do more than pray for them; namely, to continue as their ethical and religious guide, which they had not asked him to be That at once makes his future position in the monarchy clear. He is still the prophet, though no longer the judge, and, as the future was to show, he has to direct monarch as well as people. But it also hints to the people that his prayers for them will be of little avail unless they listen to his teaching. Whether a Samuel prays for us or not, if we do not listen to the voices that bid us serve God, we 'shall be consumed.'

SAUL REJECTED

'Then came the word of the Lord unto Samuel, saying, 11. It repenteth Me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following Me, and hath not performed My commandments. And it grieved Samuel; and he cried unto the Lord all night. 12. And when Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning, it was told Samuel, saying, Saul came to Carmel, and, behold, he set him up a place, and is gone about, and passed on, and gone down to Gilgal. 13. And Samuel came to Saul: and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the Lord: I have performed the commandment of the Lord. 14. And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? 15. And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed. 16. Then Samuel said unto Saul, Stay, and I will tell thee what the Lord hath said to me this night. And he said unto him, Say on.

17. And Samuel said, When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord anointed thee king over Israel? 18. And the Lord sent thee on a journey, and said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed. 19. Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the Lord, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst evil in the sight of the Lord? 20. And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and have gone the way which the Lord sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. 21. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in Gilgal. 22. And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. 23. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee from being king.'—1 SAMUEL xv. 10-23.

AGAIN the narrative takes us to Gilgal,—a fateful place for Saul. There they 'made Saul king before the Lord'; there he had taken the first step on his dark way of gloomy, proud self-will, down which he was destined to plunge so far and fatally. There he had, in consequence, received the message of the transference of the kingdom from his house, though not from himself. Now, flushed with his victory over Amalek, he has come there with his troops, laden with spoil. They had made a swift march from the south where Amalek dwelt, passing by Nabal's Carmel, where they had put up some sort of monument of their exploit in a temper of vain-glory, very unlike the spirit which reared the stone of help at Eben-ezer; and apparently they purpose sacrifices and a feast. But Samuel comes into camp with no look of congratulation. Probably the vigorous old man had walked that day from his home, some fifteen miles off, and on the way seems to have picked up tidings of Saul's victory and position, which ought to have reached him from the king himself, and would have done so if Saul's conscience had been clear. The omission to tell him was studied neglect, which revealed much.

Samuel had 'cried unto the Lord all night,' if perchance the terrible sentence might be reversed; and his cries had not been in vain, for they had brought him into complete submission, and had nerved him to do his work calmly, without a quiver or a pang of personal feeling, as becomes God's prophet.

I. We must go back a step beyond this passage to understand it. Note, first, the command which was disobeyed. The campaign against Amalek was undertaken by express divine direction through Samuel's lips. It was the delayed fulfilment of a sentence passed in the times of the Conquest, but not executed then. The terrible old usages of that period are brought into play again, and the whole nation with its possessions is 'devoted.' The word explains the dreadful usage. There are two kinds of devotion to God: that of willing, and that of unwilling, men; the one brings life, the other, death. The massacre of the foul nations of Canaan was thereby made a direct divine judgment, and removed wholly from the region of ferocious warfare. No doubt, the whole plane of morals in the earlier revelation is lower than that of the New Testament. If Jesus has not taught a higher law than was given to 'them of old time,' one large part of His gift to men disappears. The wholesale destruction of 'babe and suckling' with the guilty makes us shudder; and we are meant to feel the difference between the atmosphere of that time and ours. But we are not meant to question the reality of the divine command, nor His right to give it. He slays, and makes alive. His judgments strike the innocent with the guilty. In many a case, and often, the sin is one generation's, and the bitter fruit another's. The destruction of Canaanites and Amalekites does not change its nature because God used men to do it; and the question is not whether the Israelites were fiercely barbarous in their warfare, but whether God has the right of life and death. We grant all the dreadfulness, and joyfully admit the distance between such acts and Jesus Christ; but we recognise them as not incongruous with the whole revealed character of the God who is justice as well as love, as parallel in substance, though different in instrument, with many of His dealings with men,—as the execution of righteous sentence on rank corruption, and as sweetening the world by its removal. Most of the difficulty and repugnance has been caused by forgetting that Israel was but the sword, while the hand was God's.

II. Note the disobedience. Partial obedience is complete disobedience. Saul and his men obeyed as far as suited them; that is to say, they did not obey God at all, but their own inclinations, both in sparing the good and in destroying the worthless. What was not worth carrying off they destroyed,—not because of the command, but to save trouble. This one fault seems but a small thing to entail the loss of a kingdom. But is it so? It was obviously not an isolated act on Saul's part, but indicated his growing impatience of the divine control, exercised on him through Samuel. He was in a difficult position. He owed his kingdom to the prophet; and the very condition on which he held it was that of submission to Samuel's authority. No wonder that his elevation quickened the growth of his masterfulness and gloomy, impetuous self-will,—traits in his character which showed themselves very early in his reign! No wonder either that such a king, held in leading-strings by a prophet, should chafe! The more insignificant the act in itself, the more significant it may be as a flag of revolt. Disobedience which will not do a little thing is great disobedience. Nor was this the first time that Saul had 'kicked,' like another Saul, 'against the pricks.' Gilgal had seen a previous instance of his impetuous self-assertion, masked by apparent deference; and the inference is fair that the interval between the two pieces of rebellion had been of a piece with them. Trivial acts, especially when repeated, show deep-seated evil. There may be only a coil of the snake visible, but that betrays the presence of the slimy folds, though they are covered from sight among the leaves. The tiny shoot of a plant, peeping above the ground, does not augur that the roots are short; they may run for yards. Nor can any act be called small, of which the motive is disregard of God's plain command: 'He that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.' Saul had never much religion. He had never heard of Samuel till that day when he came to consult him about the asses. It was a wonder to his acquaintances to find him 'among the prophets'; and all his acts of worship have about them a smack of self, and an exclusive regard to the mere externals of sacrifice, which imply a shallow notion of religion and a spirit unsubdued by its deeper influences.

Such a man habitually acts in disregard of God's will; and that is great sin, though it be manifested in small acts. It is to be remembered, too, that the excepting of the best of the spoil from the general destruction, changed the whole character of the transaction, and brought it down from the level of a solemn act of divine justice, of which Saul and his army were the executors by divine mandate, to that of a mere cattle-lifting foray, in which they were but thieves for their own gain. The mingling of personal advantage with any sort of service of God, ruins the whole, and turns it into mere selfishness. Samuel, in verse 19, puts the two sides of this 'evil in the sight of the Lord,' as being disobedience and swooping down on the booty, like some bird of prey.

III. Note Saul's excuses. Throughout the whole interview he plays a sorry part, and is evidently cowed by the hated authority and personality of the old man; while Samuel, on his side, is curt, stern, and takes the upper hand, as becomes God's messenger. The relative positions of the two men are the normal ones of their offices, and explain both Saul's revolt and the chronic impatience of kings at the interference of prophets. Here we have Saul coming to meet Samuel with affected heartiness and welcome, and with the bold lie, 'I have performed the commandment of the Lord.' That is more than true obedience is quick to say. If Saul had done it, he would have been slower to boast of it. 'Those vessels yield the most sound that have the least liquor.' He 'doth protest too much'; and the protestation comes from an uneasy conscience. Or did he, like a great many other men who have no deep sense of the sanctity of every jot and tittle of a divine law, please himself with the notion that it was enough to keep it approximately, in the 'spirit' of the precept, without slavish obedience to the 'letter'? In a later part of the interview (v. 20) he insists that he has obeyed, and tries to prove it by dwelling on the points in which he did so, and gliding lightly over the others.

'Samuel had reason to believe the sheep and oxen above Saul'; and there is a tone of almost contempt for the shuffling liar in his quiet question: 'What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?' There was no answering that; so Saul shifts his ground without a blush or a moment's hesitation. 'The people spared.' It is a new character for him to appear in,—that of a weak ruler who cannot keep his unruly men in order! Had he tried to restrain them? If he had, and had failed, he was not fit to be a king. If he had not, he was a coward to shift the blame on to them. How ready men are to vilify themselves in some other direction, in order to escape the consciousness of sin, which God is seeking to force home on them! No doubt the people were very willing to have a finger in the affair; but so was he. And if the cattle was their share, Agag, who could be held to ransom, was his; and the arrangement suited all round. As to the purpose of sacrificing at Gilgal, perhaps that was true; but if it were, no doubt the same process of selection, which had destroyed the worthless and kept the best, would have been repeated; and the net result would have been a sacrifice of the least valuable, and 'the survival of the fittest' in many a pasture and stall.

But note Saul's attitude towards Jehovah, betrayed by him in that one word: 'the Lord *thy* God.' No wonder that he had been content with a partial and perfunctory obedience, if he had no closer sense of connection with God than that! There is almost a sneer in it, too, as if he had said, 'What needs all this fuss about saving the cattle? You should be pleased; for this Jehovah, with whom you profess to have special communication, will be honoured with sacrifice, and you will share in the feast.' If the words do not mean abjuring Jehovah, they go very near it, and, at all events, betray the shallowness of Saul's religion. Samuel, in his answer, reminds him of his early modesty and self-distrust, and of the source of his elevation. He then sweeps away the flimsy cobwebs of excuses, by the curt repetition of the plain, dreadful terms of Saul's commission, and then flashes out the piercing question, like a sword, 'Wherefore then didst thou not?' The reminder of past benefits, and the reiteration of the plain injunctions which have been broken, are the way to cut through the poor palliations which men wrap around their sins.

It speaks of a very obstinate and gloomy determination that, in answer, Saul should reiterate his protestation of having done as he was bid. He doggedly says over again all that he had said before, unmoved by the prophet's solemn words. He is steeling his heart against reproof; and there is only one end to that. Sin unacknowledged, after God has disclosed it, is doubly sin. The heart that answers the touch of God's rebukes by sullenly closing more tightly on its evil, is preparing itself for the blow of the hammer which will crush it. 'He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.' Let us beware of meeting God's prophet with shuffling lies about our obedience, and of opposing to the words which are loving though they pierce, the armour of impenetrable self-righteousness and conceit.

IV. Note the punishment. To the vain talk about honouring God by sacrifice, Samuel opposes the great principle which was the special message committed to every prophet in Israel, and which was repeated all through its history, side by side with the divinely appointed sacrificial system. In the intensity of his spiritual emotion, Samuel speaks in lyric strains, in the measured parallelism which was the Hebrew dress of poetry, and gives forth in words 'which will live for ever' the great truth that God delights in obedience more than in sacrifice. Whilst, on the one hand, he lifts the surrender of the will, and the consequent submission of the life, high above all mere ritual, on the other hand, by the same process, he sinks the rebellion of the will and the stubbornness of the nature, unsubdued either by kindness or threats, as Saul was showing his to be, to the level of actual idolatry.

'Rebellion is divination,
And stubbornness is idols and teraphim.'

Then comes the stern sentence of rejection. Why was Saul thus irrevocably set aside? Was it not a harsh punishment for such a crime? As we have already remarked, Saul's act is not to be judged as an isolated deed, but as the outcome of a deep tendency in him, which meant revolt from God. It was not because of the single act, but because of that which it showed him to be, that he was set aside. The sentence is pronounced, not because 'thou didst spare Amalek,' but because 'thou didst reject the word of the Lord.' Further, it is to be remembered that the punishment was but the carrying out of his act. His own hand had cut the bond between him and God, and had disqualified himself for the office which he filled. Saul had said, 'I will reign by myself.' God said, 'Be it so! By thyself thou shalt reign.' For the consequence of his deposition was not outward change in his royalty. David indeed was anointed but in secret, so Samuel consented to honour Saul before the people. All the external difference was that Samuel never saw him again, and he was relieved from the incubus of the prophet's 'interference'; that is to say, he ceased to be God's king, and became a phantom, ruling only by his own will and power, as he had wished to do. How profound may be the difference while all externals remain unchanged! When we set up ourselves as our own lords, and shake off God's rule, we cast away His sanction and help in all the deeds of our self-will, however unaltered their outward appearance may remain.

But God left him to 'walk in his own ways, and be filled with the fruit of his own devices,' by no irrevocable abandonment, however the decree of rejection from the kingship was irrevocable. The gates of repentance stood open for him; and the very sentence that came stern and laconic from Samuel's lips, rightly accepted, might have drawn him in true penitence to a forgiving God. His subsequent confession was rejected because it expressed no real contrition; and the worship which he proceeded to offer, without the sanction of the prophet's presence, was as unreal as his protestation of obedience, and showed how little he had learned the lesson of the great words, 'To obey is better than sacrifice.'

THE SHEPHERD-KING

'And the Lord said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? fill thine horn with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Beth-lehemite: for I have provided Me a king among his sons. 2. And Samuel said, How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me. And the Lord said, Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the Lord. 3. And call Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will shew thee what thou shalt do: and thou shalt anoint unto Me him whom I name unto thee. 4. And Samuel did that which the Lord spake, and came to Beth-lehem. And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, Comest thou peaceably? 5. And he said, Peaceably: I am come to sacrifice unto the Lord: sanctify yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice. And he sanctified Jesse and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice. 6. And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the Lord's anointed is before him. 7. But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. 8. Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, Neither hath the Lord chosen this. 9. Then Jesse made Shammah to pass by. And he said, Neither hath the Lord chosen this. 10. Again, Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, The Lord hath not chosen these. 11. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither. 12. And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the Lord said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he. 13. Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up, and went to Ramah.'—1 SAMUEL xvi. 1-13.

THE chief purpose in these verses is to bring out that the choice of David was purely God's. The most consummate art could have taken no better way of heightening the effect of his first appearance than that adopted in this perfectly unartificial story, which leads us up a long avenue to where the shepherd-boy stands. First, we have Samuel, with his regrets and objections; then Jesse with his seven stalwart sons; and at last, when expectation has been heightened by delay and by the minute previous details, the future king is disclosed,—a stripling with his ruddy locks glistening with the anointing oil, and his lovely eyes. We shall best catch the spirit by simply following the letter of the story.

I. We have Samuel and his errand to Bethlehem. After that sad day at Gilgal, he and Saul met no more, though their homes were but a few miles apart, and it must have been difficult to avoid each other. Samuel yearned over the man whom he had learned to love, and it must have been pain to him to see the shattering of the vessel which he had formed. However natural his mourning, and however indicative of his sweet nature, it was wrong, because it showed that he had not yet reconciled himself to God's purpose, though his conduct obeyed. The mourning which submits while it weeps, and which interferes with no duty, is never rebuked by God. He never says, 'How long dost thou mourn?' unless sorrow has deepened into accusation of His providence, or tears have blinded us to the duty that ensues. But the true cure for overmuch sorrow is work, and, for vain regrets after vanished good, the welcome to the new good which God ever sends to fill the empty place. His resources are not exhausted because one man has failed. 'There are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it.' Saul has been rejected, but a king shall be found; and Samuel is to dry his tears and anoint him. He evidently had no thought of a successor to Saul till this command came; and when it comes, how little it tells him! He gets light enough for the next step, but no more. That is always God's way. Duty opens by degrees, and the way to see farther ahead is to go as far as we see.

Samuel's sorrow and the incomplete command show plainly that he was but an instrument. At every step the view is confuted which makes him a far-seeing statesman who inaugurated and carried through a peaceful revolution. The history, which is our only source, tells another story, and makes God the actor, and the prophet only a tool in His hands. If we cut the supernatural out of the story, the fragments do not hang together, and no reason is forthcoming why they should be any more true than are the rejected pieces. Samuel does not show to advantage in either of the two things mentioned about him here. In neither was he true to his early vow, 'Speak, for Thy servant heareth.' But there was much reason for his fear, if once God was left out of the account; for Saul's ever-wakeful suspicion had become a disease, and it was not wonderful that he should be on the watch for any act which looked like putting the sentence of deposition into effect. If ever a man lived with a sword hanging by a hair over him, it was this unhappy king, who knew that he was dethroned, and did not know when or by whom the divine rejection would be made visible to all men. But Samuel had faced worse dangers without a murmur; and no doubt his alarm now, which makes him venture all but flatly to refuse to obey, indicates that, to some extent, he had lost his hold of God by his indulgence in his sorrow. If he had been true to his high calling, he would have 'filled his horn,' and gone on God's errand, careless of a hundred Sauls or a hundred deaths. But it is easy for us, who have never perilled anything for obedience, to sit in judgment on him. 'Wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself.' God judges him mercifully, and provides a shelter for his weakness, which he should not have needed. To hide his true errand behind the cloak of the sacrifice was second-best, and only permitted in consideration of his fear which had a touch of sin in it. He was not, at the moment, up to treading the heroic plain path; and God opened an easier one for him. It is sometimes allowable to use an avowed purpose to conceal the real one, but it is a permission which should be very sparingly used.

II. We have Samuel at Bethlehem, with Jesse and his sons. An old man is suddenly seen coming up the hill to the gate of the little city on foot, driving or leading a heifer, and carrying a horn in his hand. In such humble fashion did the prophet travel; but reverential awe met him, and his long years of noble service surrounded him as with a halo. Apparently, Bethlehem had not been included in his usual circuits, and the village elders were somewhat scared by his sudden appearance. Their question may give a glimpse into the severity which Samuel sometimes had to show, and is a strange testimony to the reality of his power: 'Comest thou peaceably?' One old man was no very formidable assailant of a village, even if he did not come with friendly intent; but, if he is recognised as God's messenger, his words are 'sharper than any two-edged sword,' and his unarmed hand bears weapons mighty to 'pull down strongholds.' Why should the elders have thought that he came 'with a rod'? Because they knew that they and their fellow-villagers deserved it. If men were not dimly conscious of sin, they would not be afraid of God's messenger or of God.

The narrative does not tell whether or not the sacrifice preceded the review of Jesse's sons. Probably it did, and the interval between it and the feast was occupied in the interview It is evident that Samuel kept the reason of his wish to see Jesse's sons to himself; for disclosure would have brought about the danger which he was so anxious to avoid. It appears, too, from verse 13, that only the family of Jesse were present. So we have to fancy the wondering little cluster of burly husbandmen with their father surrounding the prophet, and, one by one, bracing themselves to meet his searching gaze. Again the choice is emphatically represented as God's, by the mention of Samuel's hasty conclusion, from the look of the eldest, that he was the man. Had not Samuel had enough of kings of towering stature? Strange that he should have been in such a hurry to fix on a second edition of Saul! The most obedient waiters on God sometimes outrun His intimations, and they always go wrong when they do. Samuel has to learn two lessons, as he is bidden to repress the too quick thought: one, that he is not choosing, but only registering God's choice; and one, that the qualifications for God's king are inward, not bodily. In these old days, the world's monarchs had to be men of thews and sinews, for power rested on mere brute force: but God's chosen had to rule, not by the strength of his own arm, but by leaning on God's. The genius of the kingdom determined the principle of selection of its king. Samuel does not again attempt to forecast the choice; but he lets the other six pass, and, hearing no inward voice from God, tells Jesse, as it would seem, that the Lord has not chosen them for whatsoever mysterious purpose was in His mind.

III. We have 'the Lord's chosen.' Samuel was staggered by the apparent failure of his errand. God had told him that he had provided a king from this family, and now they had passed in review before him, and none was chosen. Again he is made to feel his own impotence, and his question, 'Are here all thy children?' has a touch of bewilderment in it. God seldom shows us His choice at first; and both in thought and practice we get at the precious and the true by a process of exclusion, having often to reject 'seven' before we find in some all-but-forgotten 'eighth' that which we seek. David's insignificance in Jesse's eyes was such that his father would never have remembered his existence but for the question, and his answer is a kind of assurance to the prophet that he need not take the trouble to see the boy, for he will never do for whatever he may have in view. His youth and occupation put him out of the question. We know, from the other parts of his story, that his brothers had no love for him; nor does his father seem to have had much. Probably the lad had the usual lot of genius,—to grow up among uncongenial, commonplace people, understanding him little, and liking him less. It is a hard school; but where it does not sour, it makes strong men. His solitary shepherd life taught him many precious lessons, and, at any rate, gave him the price-less gift of solitude, which is the nurse of poetry, heroism, and religion. The glorious night-piece in Psalm viii., and its companion day-piece in Psalm xix., may bear the impress of the shepherd life; which is idealised and sanctified for ever in the immortal sweetness of Psalm xxiii. There were many worse schools for the future king than a solitary shepherd's life on the bare hills round Bethlehem.

The delay of the feast and the pause of idle waiting heighten the expectation with which we look for David's coming. When he does come, what a bright young figure is lovingly painted for us! He is 'ruddy, and withal fair of eyes, and goodly to look upon,'—of fair complexion, with golden hair (rare among these swarthy Orientals), and with lustrous poet's eyes. What a contrast to Saul's grim face and figure,—like a sunbeam streaming athwart a thunder-cloud seamed with its own lightning! Silently the divine voice spoke, and silently, as it would seem, Samuel poured the oil on the boy's bowed curls. No word of the purpose escaped his lips, and the awestruck youth was left to wonder for what high destiny he was chosen. One can fancy the looks of his brothers as they bitterly watched the anointing with hearts full of envy, contempt, and rage. 1 Samuel xvii. 28 shows what they felt to David.

What was the use of this enigmatical anointing for an undisclosed purpose? It is Samuel's last act, and his last appearance, except for the mention of David's flight to him from the court of Saul, and that weird scene of Saul prophesying and lying naked before Samuel and David for a day and a night. It was therefore the solemn final act of the prophet,—transferring the monarchy; but it was for David the beginning of his training for the throne, in two ways

'The Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward.' There was an actual communication of divine gifts fitting him for his unknown office, and he was conscious of a new spirit stirring in him. Beside this, the consciousness of a call to unknown tasks would mature him fast, and bring graver thoughts, humbler sense of weakness, and clinging trust in God who had laid the burden on him; and the necessity for repressing his dreams of the future, in order to do his obscure present duties, would add patience and self-control to his youthful ardour. What a whirl of thoughts he carried back to his flock, and how welcome would the solitude be!

The great lesson here is the one so continually re-iterated in Scripture, from Isaac downwards, that God 'chooses the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty,' and thereby magnifies both the sovereign freedom of His choice and the power of His Spirit, which takes the stripling from the sheepcotes and qualifies him to be the antagonist of the grim Saul, and the king of Israel. There are subsidiary lessons, especially for young and ardent souls confined for the present to lowly tasks, and feeling some call to something higher in a dim future. Patience, the faithful doing of to-day's trivial tasks, the habit of self-repression, the quiet trust in God who opens the way in due time,—these, and such like, were the signs that David was called to a throne, and that God's Spirit was preparing him for it. They are the virtues which will best prepare us for whatever the future may have in store for us, and will be in themselves abundant reward, whether they draw after them a high position, which is a heavy burden, or, more happily, leave us in our sheltered obscurity.

THE VICTORY OF UNARMED FAITH

'And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine. 33. And Saul said to David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth. 34. And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock; 35. And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. 36. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. 37. David said moreover, The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul said unto David, Go, and the Lord be with thee. 38. And Saul armed David with his armour, and he put an helmet of brass upon his head; also he armed him with a coat of mail. 39. And David girded his sword upon his armour, and he assayed to go; for he had not proved it. And David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these; for I have not proved them. And David put them off him. 40. And he took his staff in his hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling was in his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine. 41. And the Philistine came on and drew near unto David; and the man that bare the shield went before him. 42. And when the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he disdained him: for he was but a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair countenance. 43. And the Philistine said unto David, Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. 44. And the Philistine said to David, Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field. 45. Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. 46. This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcases of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. 47. And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands. 48. And it came to pass, when the Philistine arose, and came and drew nigh to meet David, that David hasted, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine. 49. And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth. 50. So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote the Philistine, and slew him; but there was no sword in the hand of David. 51. Therefore David ran, and stood upon the Philistine, and took his sword, and drew it out of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut off his head therewith. And when the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they fled.'—1 SAMUEL xvii. 32-51.

THE scene of David's victory has been identified in the present Wady Es-Sunt, which still possesses one of the terebinth-trees which gave it its name of 'Elah.' At that point it is about a quarter of a mile wide, and runs nearly east and west. In the centre is 'a deep trench or gulley, the sides and bed of which are strewn with rounded and water-worn pebbles.' This is the 'valley,' or rather 'ravine' of verse 3 of this chapter, which is described by a different word from that for 'vale' in verse 2—the one meaning a much broader opening than the other—and from it came the 'five smooth stones.' Notice the minute topographical accuracy, which indicates history, not legend. The pebble-bed may supply a missile to hit the modern 'giant' of sceptical criticism, who boasts much after Goliath's fashion.

The two armies lay looking at each other across the valley, with occasional skirmishes; and for forty days (probably a round number) Goliath paraded on his own, the south, side of the gulley, shouting out his taunts and challenge with a voice like a bull. Many a similar scene in classical and mediæval warfare confirms the truth of the picture, so unlike modern battles. The story is, for all time, the example of the victory of unarmed faith over the world's utmost might. It is in little the history of the Church and the type of all battles for God. It is a pattern for the young especially. The youthful athlete leaps into the arena, and overcomes, not because of his own strength, but because he trusts in God.

I. Note the glowing youthful enthusiasm which dares the conflict. When the Spirit of the Lord left Saul, his courage seems to have gone too, and he is cowed, like the rest, by Goliath. His interview with David shows him as timid and unlike his former self, when he dashed at Nahash and any odds. Now he is hardly to be roused, even by David's contagious boldness, and is full of objections and precautions. The temper of the two, as they front each other in Saul's tent, shows that the one has lost, and the other received, the Spirit which strengthens. David has become the encourager, and his cheery words bring some hopefulness to the gloomy, faint-hearted king. The Septuagint has a variant reading in verse 32, which brings this out and suits the context, 'Let not my lord's heart fail.' But, whether this be adopted or no, David appears as quite unaffected by the terror which had unmanned the army, and as bringing a buoyant disregard of the enemy, like a reviving breeze. It was not merely youthful daring, nor foolish under-estimation of the danger, which prompted his stimulating words. The ring of true faith is in them, and they show us how we may surround ourselves with an atmosphere which will keep prevailing faint-heartedness off us, and make us, like Gideon's fleece, impervious to the chill mists of faithless fear which saturate all around. He who trusts in God should be as a pillar of fire, burning bright in the darkness of terror, and making a rallying point for weaker hearts. When panic has seized others, the Christian soul has the more reason for courage. David conquered the temptation to share in the general cowardice, before he conquered Goliath, and perhaps the former fight was the worse of the two.

While David is the embodiment of the courage of faith, Saul embodies worldly wisdom and calculating prudence. A touch of tenderness blends with his attempt to dissuade the lad from the unequal conflict. He speaks of probabilities, and, like all such calculation, his results are quite right, only that he has not taken all the forces into account, and the omission vitiates the conclusion. It is quite true that David is but a youth, and Goliath a giant and a veteran; but is that all that is to be said? If it be, then the lad cannot fight the Philistine bully; but if Saul has made the small omission of leaving out God, that makes a difference. The same mistake is constantly made still, and so the victories of faith are a constant surprise to the world and to a worldly Church. David's eager story of his fights with wild beasts is meant both to answer Saul's objection on his own ground, by showing him that, youth as the speaker was, he had proved his power, and still more to supply the lacking element in the calculation. So he tells, first, how 'I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him,' and then at the end brings in the true ground of his confidence: 'The Lord that delivered me . . . He will deliver.' As Thomas Fuller says, 'He made an experimental syllogism, and from most practical premises (major a lion, minor a bear,) inferred the direct conclusion that God would give him victory over Goliath.' Faith has the right thus to argue from the past to the future, because it draws from God whose resources and patience are equally inexhaustible. An echo of the words comes from Paul's 'Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that He will yet deliver.' There is infinite pathos in Saul's parting blessing. 'The Lord be with thee!' is spoken as if from the consciousness that the Lord had left *him*, and that *his* day for going into battle with the assurance of His help was gone for ever. If that softened mood had lasted, how different his future might have been! If we modestly and boldly show the power of faith in our lives, we may kindle yearnings in some gloomy hearts, that would lead them to peace, if followed out.

II. The equipment of faith. Saul meant to honour as well as to secure David by dressing him in his own royal attire, and by encumbering him by the help of sword and helmet. And David was willing to be so fitted out, for it is no part of the courage of faith to disdain any outward helps. But he soon found that he could not move freely in the unaccustomed armour, and flung it off, like a wise man. His motive was partly common sense, which told him not to choose weapons that his antagonist could handle better than he; and partly reliance on God, which told him that he was safer with no armour but his shepherd's dress and with only his sling in his hand. So there he stands, drawn for us with wonderful vividness, in one hand his staff, in the other his sling, both familiar and often used, and by his side the simple wallet which had held his frugal meal, and now received the smooth pebbles that he picked up as he passed the gulley to the Philistine side of the valley.

How graphically the contrast is drawn between him and Goliath, as the latter comes forth swelling with his own magnificence, and preceded by his shield-bearer! He was 'brass' all over; note the kind of amused emphasis with which the word is repeated in the half-satirical and marvellously lifelike portrait of him in verses 5-8; 'brass' here, 'brass' there, 'brass' everywhere; and, not content with one shield dangling at his back, he has a man to carry another in front of him as he struts. David seems to have crossed the ravine, and to have come close up to Goliath before he was observed; and then, with almost a snort of contempt, the giant resents the insult of sending such a foe to fight *him* with such weapons. Perhaps he was nearer the truth than he thought, when he asked if he was a dog; and any stick will do, as the proverb says, to beat that animal, especially if God guards the hand that holds it.

The five smooth stones have become the symbol of the insignificant means, in the world's estimate, which God uses in faithful hands to slay the giants of evil. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but they are mighty. Faith unarmed is armed with more than triple steel, and a sling in its hand is more fatal than a sword. Sometimes in kindness and sometimes in malice, the world tempts us to fight evil with its own weapons, and to put on its unfamiliar armour. The Church as a whole, and individual Christians, have often been hampered, and all but smothered, in Saul's harness. The more simply we keep ourselves to the simple methods which the word of God enjoins, and to the simple weapons which ought to be the easiest for a Christian, the more likely shall we be to conquer. Goliath is not to be encountered with sword and armour which is, after all, but a shabby copy of the tons of brass which he wears, but he does not know what to make of the sling, and does not see the stone till it crashes his skull in.

III. Note faith's anticipation of victory. The dialogue before the battle has many parallels in classical times and among savage peoples. Goliath's bluster is full of contempt of David and truculent self-confidence. Its coarseness is characteristic,—he will make his boyish antagonist food for vultures and jackals. It is exactly what a bully would say. David's answer throbs with buoyant confidence, and stands as a stimulating example of the temper in which God's soldiers should go out to every fight, no matter against what odds. It fully recognises the formidable armoury of the enemy,—sword for close quarters, spear to thrust with, and javelin to fling from a distance, every weapon that ingenuity could fashion and trained skill could wield. Goliath was a walking arsenal, and little

David took count of his weapons as they clanked and flashed. It is no part of faith's triumph to ignore the number and sharpness of the enemy's arms. But faith sees them all, and keeps unterrified and unashamed of the poor leathern sling and smooth stones. The unarmed hand which grasps God's hand should never tremble; and he who can say 'I come . . . in the name of the Lord of hosts,' has no need to be afraid of an army of Goliaths, though each bristled with swords and spears like a porcupine.

The great name on which David's faith rested, 'the Lord of hosts,' appears to have sprung into use in this epoch, and to have been one precious fruit of its frequent wars. Conflict is blessed if it teaches the knowledge of the unseen Commander who marshals not only men, but all the forces of the universe and the armies of heaven, for the defence of His servants and the victory of His own cause. The fulness of the divine name is learned by degrees, as our needs impress the various aspects of His character; and the revelation contained in this appellation is the gift of that fierce and stormy time, a possession for ever. He who defies the armies of Israel has to reckon with the Lord of these armies, whose name proclaims at once His eternal, self-originated, and self-sustained being, His covenant, His presence with His earthly host, and the infinite ranks of obedient creatures who are His soldiers and their allies. That is 'the Name' in the strength of which we may 'set up our banners' and be sure of victory. Note how David flings back Goliath's taunts in his teeth. He is sure that God will conquer through him, and, though he has no sword, that he will somehow hack the big head off; and that it is the host of the Philistines on whom the vultures and jackals are to feed to-day

His faith sees the victory before the battle is begun, and trusts, not in his own weak power, but only 'in the name of the Lord.' Note, too, the result which he expects—no glory for himself, though that came unsought, when the shrill songs from the women of Israel met the victors, but to all the world the proof that Israel had a God, and to Israel ('this assembly') the renewed lesson of their true weapons and of their Almighty Helper. Such utter suppression of self is inseparable from trust in God, and without it no soldier of His has a right to expect victory. To fight 'in the name of the Lord' requires hiding our own name. If we are really going to war for Him, and in His strength, we ought to expect to conquer. Believe that you will be beaten, and you will be. Trust to Him to make you 'more than conquerors,' and the trust will bring about its own fulfilment.

IV. Observe the contrast in verse 48 between the slow movements of the heavy-armed Philistine and the quick run of the shepherd, whose 'feet were as hind's feet' (Psalm xviii. 33). Agility and confident alacrity were both expressed. His feet were shod with 'the preparedness of faith.' Observe, too, the impetuous brevity of the account in verse 49, of the actual fall of Goliath. The short clauses, coupled by a series of 'ands,' reproduce the swift succession of events, which ended the fight before it had begun; and one can almost hear the whiz of the stone as it crashes into the thick head, so strangely left unprotected by all the profusion of brass that clattered about him. The vulnerable heel of Achilles and the unarmed forehead of Goliath illustrate the truth, ever forgotten and needing to be repeated, that, after all precautions, some spot is bare. and that 'there is no armour against fate.'

The picture of the huge 'man-mountain' fallen upon his face to the earth, a huddled heap of useless mail, recalls the words of a psalm, 'When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell' (Psalm xxvii. 2). Is it fanciful to hear in that triumphant chant an echo of Goliath's boast about giving his flesh to the fowls and the beasts, and a vision of the braggart as he tottered and lay prostrate? Observe, too, the contemptuous reiteration of 'the Philistine,' which occurs six times in the four verses (48-51). National feeling speaks in that. There is triumph in the sarcastic repetition of the dreaded name in such a connection. This was what one of the brood had got, and his fate was an omen of what would befall the rest. The champion of Israel, the soldier of God, standing over the dead Philistine, all whose brazen armour had been useless and his brazen insolence abased, and sawing off his head with his own sword, was a prophecy for the Israel of that day, and will be a symbol till the end of time of the true equipment, the true temper, and the certain victory, of all who, in the name of the Lord of hosts, go forth in their weakness against the giants of ignorance, vice, and sin. 'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.'

A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

'And David went out whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely: and Saul set him over the men of war; and he was accepted in the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's servants. 6. And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of musick. 7. And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands. 8. And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and t me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom? 9. And Saul eyed David from that day and forward. 10. And it came to pass on the morrow, that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house: and David played with his hand, as at other times: and there was a javelin in Saul's hand. 11. And Saul cast the javelin: for he said, I will smite David even to the wall with it. And David avoided out of his presence twice. 12. And Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him, and was departed from Saul. 13. Therefore Saul removed him from him, and made him his captain over a thousand; and he went out and came in before the people. 14. And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the Lord was with him. 15. Wherefore, when Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely, he was afraid of him. 16. But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them.'—1 Samuel xviii. 5-16.

Verse 5 anticipates verses 13-16. It is the last verse of a section which interrupts the even flow of the story, and which is absent from the Septuagint. Verse 6 follows immediately on xvii. 54 in that version. Taking that verse as our starting-point, we have three stages in Saul's growing hatred and awe of the young champion, and of David's growing influence and reputation. It is deeply tragic to watch the gradual darkening of the once bright light, side by side with the irresistible increase in brilliance of the new star. 'He must increase, but I must decrease,' became Saul's bitter conviction; but instead of meekly accepting the necessity, his gloomy spirit struggled against it, like stormy waves against a breakwater, and, like them, was shivered into foam in the vain effort.

I. The first stage was Saul's jealousy of David's fame as a warrior. The returning victorious army was met, in Oriental fashion, by a triumphal chorus of women, with their shrill songs, accompanied by the dissonant noises which do duty for music to Eastern ears. The words of their chant were startlingly and ominously plain-spoken, and became more emphatic and insulting in Saul's ears, because they were sung by two answering bands, one of which rang out, 'Saul hath slain his thousands,' while the other overtopped them by pealing out still more loudly and exultantly, 'And David his ten thousands.' To be brought into comparison with this unknown stripling was bitter enough, but to be used as a foil to set off his superiority was too much to be borne. There are few men, holding high places in any walk of life, who could have stood such a comparison without wincing. Suppose a great soldier in our day, coming home from a successful campaign, and having his prowess dimmed in every newspaper by the praises lavished on a young lieutenant who had done some brave feat that caught the public fancy—would he be likely to be in a very amiable mood towards either the singers or the object of their triumphal songs? Do great authors rejoice in the rising of young reputations that dim theirs? or do great orators smile when some 'boy' takes the public ear more than they do? Poor Saul had to drink the bitter cup, which all who love the sweet draught of popular applause have sooner or later to taste; and we need not think him a monster of badness because he found it bitter.

It will be more to the purpose that we take care lest we do the very same thing in our little lives and humble spheres; for envy and jealousy of those who threaten to out-shine, or in any way to out-do, us is not confined to people in high places or with great reputations. The roots of them are in us all, and the only way to keep them from growing up rank is to think less of our reputation and more of our duty, to count it a very small matter what men think of us, and the all-important matter what God thinks.

Saul was moved, too, by the consciousness that he had been really deposed by Jehovah, and was only a phantom king, and, as his angry soliloquy shows, what troubled him most in the women's song was that it pointed to David as likely to come in and rob him, not only of glory, but of the kingdom. Ever since Samuel had pronounced his rejection, his uneasy eyes had been furtively scanning men for his possible supplanter, and no wonder that his gloomy suspicions focussed themselves on the gallant youth, who conquered men's hearts and made women's tongues eloquent in his praise. Stormy and dark as Saul's nature had become, and grave as had been his failure to be worthy of the monarchy, one cannot but feel the infinite pathos and pity of his life.

II. The second stage was the attempt on David's life. Verses 10 and 11, which record it, are not in the Septuagint, and the narrative does run more smoothly without them. But if they are retained, they show how the moody suspicion with which Saul 'eyed David came to a swift, murderous climax. He stands as a terrible example of how suspicion and jealousy, working in a nature utterly without self-control, transport it into the wildest excesses. In the strange phraseology of verse 9, 'an evil spirit from God' laid hold of him, dominating his personality. The writer of this book felt that God was the ultimate cause of all things, and that all beings were under His control; and his devout recognition of that fact led him to the apparent paradox of tracing an 'evil spirit' to God. But we must not be so startled as to overlook the truth that Saul had prepared the fit abode for that evil spirit by his own indulgence in a whirl of sinful passions and acts, and that these were punished by their 'natural' consequence. Any man who lets his own baser nature have full fling invites the devil. Saul had what would now be called a paroxysm of insanity. But perhaps the modern medical phrase is not to be preferred to the old scriptural one. The former is innocent of any explanation of the fact which it designates, and it may possibly be that insanity is sometimes, even now, 'possession.' At all events, since science gives no explanation of it, and a great dim region of consciousness is now being recognised,—'subliminal,' to speak in the new phraseology,—he is a bold man who ventures to deny that possibility.

But be that as it may, what a striking picture is given of Saul, worn with passion and swept away by ungovernable impulses, 'prophesying' or 'raving' with wild gestures and uttering wilder sounds; and of David, young, calm, giving forth melodies on his harp and songs from his lips, that sought to soothe the paroxysms of fury. Browning has drawn the picture in immortal words, which all who can should read. It has been suggested that Saul did not 'cast' his spear, but only brandished it in his fierce threat to pin David to the wall. But the youthful harper would scarcely have 'avoided out of his presence' for a mere threat and the flourish of a lance; and a man, raging mad and madly hostile, would not be likely to waste breath in mere threats. The attempt was more probably a serious one, and the spear, flung by an arm made stronger than ever by insane hatred, quivered in the wall very near the lithe athlete who had agilely escaped it. Envy, allowed to have its way, becomes murderous. Let us suppress its beginning. A tiger pup can be held in and its claws cut, but a full-grown tiger cannot.

III. The third stage is Saul's getting rid of David. The growing awe of him is marked in verses 12 and 15, and the word in the latter verse is stronger than that in the former. It is a pathetic picture of the gradual creeping over a strong man of a nameless terror.

Ever-thickening folds of cold dread, like a wet mist, wrap a soul once bright and energetic. And the reason is twofold: first, that God had left that tempestuous, rebellious soul because it had left Him; and second, that, in its desolate solitude, in which there was no trace of softening or penitence, that lightning-riven soul knew that the sunshine, which it had repelled, was now pouring on David. Saul's suspicions were hardened into certainties. He was sure now that what his jealousy had whispered, when the women chanted their chorus, was grim fact. And he could but helplessly watch his supplanter's steady advance in favour with men and God. The two processes of growing darkness and growing light go on side by side in the two men, and each makes the other more striking by contrast. Twice is it repeated that Saul was in awe of David. Twice is it repeated that Jehovah was with David, and that he 'behaved himself wisely,' which last statement includes in the Hebrew word both the idea of prudence and that of success. So, on the one hand, there is a steady growth in all good, godly, and happy qualities and experiences; and on the other, a tragical increase of darkness and gloom, godlessness and despair. And yet Saul had begun so well! And Saul might have been what David was,—companioned by God, prosperous, and the idol of his people. Two souls stand side by side for a moment on the same platform, with the same divine goodness and love encircling them, and the one steadily rises, while the other steadily sinks. How awful are the endless possibilities of progress in either direction that lie open for every soul of man!

JONATHAN, THE PATTERN OF FRIENDSHIP

'And David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and came and said before Jonathan, What have I done? what is mine iniquity? and what is my sin before thy father, that he seeketh my life? 2. And he said unto him, God forbid; thou shalt not die: behold, my father will do nothing either great or small, but that he will shew it me: and why should my father hide this thing from me? it is not so. 3. And David sware moreover, and said, Thy father certainly knoweth that I have found grace in thine eyes; and he saith, Let not Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved: but truly, as the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death. 4. Then said Jonathan unto David, Whatsoever thy soul desireth, I will even do it for thee. 5. And David said unto Jonathan, Behold, to-morrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit with the king at meat: but let me go, that I may hide myself in the field unto the third day at even. 6. If thy father at all miss me, then say, David earnestly asked leave of me that he might run to Beth-lehem his city: for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the family. 7. If he say thus, it is well; thy servant shall have peace: but if he be very wroth, then be sure that evil is determined by him. 8. Therefore thou shalt deal kindly with thy servant; for thou hast brought thy servant into a covenant of the Lord with thee: notwithstanding, if there be in me iniquity, slay me thyself; for why shouldest thou bring me to thy father? 9. And Jonathan said, Far be it from thee: for if I knew certainly that evil were determined by my father to come upon thee, then would not I tell it thee? 10. Then said David to Jonathan, Who shall tell me? or what if thy father answer thee roughly? 11. And Jonathan said unto David, Come, and let us go out into the field. And they went out both of them into the field. 12. And Jonathan said unto David, O Lord God of Israel, when I have sounded my father about to-morrow any time, or the third day, and, behold, if there be good toward David, and I then send not unto thee, and shew it thee; 13. The Lord do so and much more to Jonathan: but if it please my father to do thee evil, then I will shew it thee, and send thee away, that thou mayest go in peace: and the Lord be with thee, as He hath been with my father.'—1 SAMUEL xx. 1-13.

THE friendship of Jonathan for David comes like a breath of pure air in the midst of the heavy-laden atmosphere of hate and mad fury, or like some clear fountain sparkling up among the sulphurous slag and barren scoriæ of a volcano. There is no more beautiful page in history or poetry than the story of the passionate love of the heir to the throne for the young champion, whom he had so much cause to regard as a rival. What a proof of the victory of love over self is his saying, 'Thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee'! (1 Samuel xxiii. 17). Truly did David sing in his elegy, 'Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women';

for in that old world, in which the relations between the sexes had not yet received the hallowing and refinement of Christian times, much of what is now chiefly found in these was manifested in friendship, such as that of these two young men. Jonathan is the foremost figure in it, and the nobility and self-oblivion of his love are beautifully brought out, while David's part is rather that of the loved than of the lover. The scene is laid in Gibeah, where Saul kept his court, and to which all the persons of the story seem to have come back from Samuel's house at Ramah. Saul's strange subjugation to the hallowing influences of the prophet's presence had been but momentary and superficial; and it had been followed by a renewed outburst of the old hate, obvious to David's sharpened sight, though not to Jonathan. In the interview between them, David is pardonably but obviously absorbed in self, while Jonathan bends all his soul to cheer and reassure his friend.

There are four turns in the conversation, in each of which David speaks and Jonathan answers. David's first question presupposes that his friend knows that his death is determined, and is privy to Saul's thoughts. If he had been less harassed, he would have done Jonathan more justice than to suppose him capable of knowing everything without telling him anything; but fear is suspicious. He should have remembered that, when Saul first harboured murderous purposes, Jonathan had not waited to be asked, but had disclosed the plot to him, and perilled his own life by his remonstrances with his father. He should have trusted his friend. His question breathes consciousness of innocence of any hostility to Saul, but unconsciously betrays some defect in his confidence in

Jonathan. The answer is magnanimous in its silence as to that aspect of the question, though the subsequent story seems to imply that Jonathan felt it. He tries to hearten David by strong assurances that his life is safe. He does not directly contradict David's implication that he knew more than he had told, but, without asserting his ignorance, takes it for granted, and quietly argues from it the incorrectness of David's suspicions. Incidentally he gives us, in the picture of the perfect confidence between Saul and himself, an inkling of how much he had to sacrifice to his friendship. Wild as was Saul's fury when aroused, and narrow as had been his escape from it at an earlier time (1 Samuel xiv. 44), there was yet love between them, and the king made a confidant of his gallant eldest son. They 'were lovely and pleasant in their lives.' However gloomy and savage in his paroxysms Saul was, the relations between them were sweet. The most self-introverted and solitary soul needs some heart to pour itself out to, and this poor king found one in Jonathan. All the harder, then, was the trial of friendship when the trusted son had to take the part of the friend whom his father deemed an enemy, and had the pain of breaking such close ties. How his heart must have been torn asunder! On the one side was the lonely father who clung to him: on the other, the hunted friend to whom he clung. It is a sore wrench when kindred are on one side, and congeniality and the voice of the heart on the other. But there are ties more sacred than those of flesh and blood; and the putting of them second, which is sometimes needful in obedience to earthly love or duty, is always needful if we would rightly entertain our heavenly Friend.

Jonathan's soothing assurances did not satisfy David, and he 'sware' in the earnestness of his conviction. David gives a very good reason for his friend's ignorance, which he has at once believed, in the suggestion that Saul had not taken him into his confidence, out of tenderness to his feelings. Their friendship, then, was notorious, and, indeed, was an element in Saul's dread of David, who seemed to have some charm to steal hearts, and had bewitched both Saul's son and his daughter, thus making a painful rift in the family unity. It does not appear how David came to be so sure of Saul's designs. The incident at Ramah might have seemed to augur some improvement in his mood; and certainly there could have been no overt acts, or Jonathan could not have disputed the suspicions. Possibly some whispers may have reached David through his wife Michal, Saul's daughter, or in the course of his attendance on the king, which he had now resumed, his quick eye may have noticed ominous signs. At all events, he is so sure, that he makes solemn attestation to his friend, and convinces him that, in the picturesque phrase which has become so familiar, 'There is but a step between me and death.' Such temper was scarcely in accordance with 'the prophecies which went before on' him. If he had been walking by faith, he would have called Samuel's anointing to mind, and have drawn arguments from the victory over Goliath, for trust in victory over Saul, as he had done for the former from that over the lion and the bear. But faith does not always keep high-water mark, and we can only too easily sympathise with this momentary ebb of its waters.

None the less is it true that David's terror was unworthy, and showed that the strain of his anxious position was telling on his spirit, and making him not only suspect his earthly friend, but half forget his heavenly One. There was but a step between him and death; but, if he had been living in the serenity of trust, he would have known that the narrow space was as good as a thousand miles, and that Saul could not force him across it, for all his hatred and power.

Jonathan does not attempt to alter his conviction and probably is obliged to admit the justice of the explanation of his own ignorance and the truth of the impression of Saul's purposes. But he does what is more to the purpose; he pledges himself to do whatever David desires. It is an unconditional desertion of his father and alliance with David; it is the true voice of friendship or love, which ever has its delight in knowing and doing the will of the beloved. It answers David's thoughts rather than his words. He will not discuss any more whether he or David is right; but, in any event, he is his friend's.

The touchstone of friendship is practical help and readiness to do what the friend wishes. It is so in our friendships here, which are best cemented so. It is so in the highest degree in our friendship with the true Friend and Lover of us all, the sweetness and power of our friendship with whom we do not know until we say, 'Whatsoever thou desirest, I will do it,' and so lose the burden of self-will, and find that He does for us what we desire when we make His desires our law of conduct.

Secure of Jonathan's help, David proposed the stratagem for finding out Saul's disposition, which had probably been in his mind all along. It says more for his subtlety than for his truthfulness. With all his nobility, he had a streak of true Oriental craft and stood on the moral level of his times and country, in his readiness to eke out the lion's skin with the fox's tail. It was a shrewd idea to make Saul betray himself by the way in which he took David's absence; but a lie is a lie, and cannot be justified, though it may be palliated, by the straits of the liar. At the same time it is fair to remember the extremity of David's danger and the morality of his age, in estimating, not the nature of his action, but the extent of his guilt in doing it. The same relaxation of the vigour of his faith which left him a prey to fear, led him to walk in crooked paths, and the impartial narrative tells of them without a word of comment. We have to form our own estimate of the fitness of a lie to form the armour of a saint. The proposal informs us of two facts,—the custom of having a feast for three days at the new moon, and that of having an annual family feast and sacrifice, neither of which is prescribed in the law. I do not here deal with the grave question as to the date of the ceremonial law, as affected by these and similar phenomena; but I may be allowed the passing remark that the irregularities do not prove the non-existence of the law, but may be accounted for by supposing that, in such unsettled times, it had been loosely observed, and that many accretions and omissions, some of them inevitable in the absence of a recognised centre of worship, had crept in. That is a much less brilliant and much more old-fashioned explanation than the new one, but perhaps it is none the worse for that. This generation is fond of making 'originality' and 'brilliancy' the tests of truth.

David's words in verse 8 have a touch of suspicion in them, in their very appeal for kind treatment, in their reminder of the 'covenant' of friendship, as if Jonathan needed either, and still more in the bitter request to slay him himself instead of delivering him to Saul. He almost thinks that Jonathan is in the plot, and means to carry him off a prisoner. Note, too, that he does not say, 'We made a covenant,' but 'Thou hast brought me into' it, as if it had been the other's wish rather than his. All this was beneath true friendship, and it hurt Jonathan, who next speaks with unusual emotion, beseeching David to clear all this fog out of his heart, and to believe in the genuineness and depth of his love, and in the frankness of his speech. True love 'is not easily provoked,' is not soon angry, and his was true in spite of many obstacles which might have made him as jealous as his father, and in the face of misconstruction and suspicion. May we not think of a yet higher love, which bears with our suspicions and faithless doubts, and ever answers our incredulity by its gentle 'If it were not so, I would have told you'?

David is not yet at the end of his difficulties, and next suggests, how is he to know Saul's mind? Jonathan takes him out into the privacy of the open country (they had apparently been in Gibeah), and there solemnly calls God to witness that he will disclose his father's purposes, whatever they are. The language is obscure and broken, whether owing to corruption in the text, or to the emotion of the speaker. In half-shaped sentences, which betray how much he felt his friend's doubts, and how sincere he was, he invokes evil on himself if he fails to tell all. He then unfolds his ingenious scheme for conveying the information, on which we do not touch. But note the final words of Jonathan,—that prayer, so pathetic, so unselfish in its recognition of David as the inheritor of the kingdom that had dropped from his own grasp, so sad in its clear-eyed assurance of his father's abandonment, so deeply imbued with faith in the divine word, and so resigned to its behests. Both in the purity of his friendship and in the strength of his faith and submission, Jonathan stands here above David, and is far surer than the latter himself is of his high destiny and final triumph. It was hard for him to believe in the victory which was to displace his own house, harder still to rejoice in it, without one trace of bitterness mingling in the sweetness of his love, hardest of all actively to help it and to take sides against his father; but all these difficulties his unselfish heart overcame, and he stands for all time as the noblest example of human friendship, and as not unworthy to remind us, as from afar off and dimly, of the perfect love of the Firstborn Son of the true King, who has loved us all with a yet deeper, more patient, more self-sacrificing love. If men can love one another as Jonathan loved David, how should they love the Christ who has loved them so much! And what sacrilege it is to pour such treasures of affection at the feet of dear ones here, and to give so grudgingly such miserable doles of heart's love to Him!

LOVE FOR HATE, THE TRUE *QUID PRO QUO*

'And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the Lord said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee. Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe privily. 5. And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt. 6. And he said unto his men, The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord. 7. So David stayed his servants with these words, and suffered them not to rise against Saul. But Saul rose up out of the cave, and went on his way. 8. David also arose afterward, and went out of the cave, and cried after Saul, saying, My Lord the king. And when Saul looked behind him, David stooped with his face to the earth and bowed himself. 9. And David said to Saul, Wherefore hearest thou men's words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt? 10. Behold, this day thine eyes have seen how that the Lord had delivered thee to-day into mine hand in the cave: and some bade me kill thee: but mine eye spared thee; and I said, I will not put forth mine hand against my lord; for he is the Lord's anointed. 11. Moreover, my father, see, yea, see the skirt of thy robe in my hand: for in that I cut off the skirt of thy robe, and killed thee not, know thou and see that there is neither evil nor transgression in mine hand, and I have not sinned against thee; yet thou huntest my soul to take it. 12. The Lord judge between me and thee, and the Lord avenge me of thee; but mine hand shall not be upon thee. 13. As saith the proverb of the ancients, Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked: but mine hand shall not be upon thee. 14. After whom is the king of Israel come out? after whom dost thou pursue? after a dead dog, after a flea. 15. The Lord therefore be judge, and judge between me and thee, and see, and plead my cause, and deliver me out of thine hand. 16. And it came to pass, when David had made an end of speaking these words unto Saul, that Saul said, Is this thy voice, my son David? And Saul lifted up his voice, and wept. 17. And he said to David, Thou art more righteous than I; for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil.'—1 SAMUEL xxiv. 4-17.

A SUDDEN Philistine invasion had saved David, when hard pressed by Saul, and had given him the opportunity of flight to the wild country on the west of the Dead Sea, near the place where En-Gedi ('the Fountain of the Wild Goat') sparkles into light on the hill above the weird lake. In these savage gorges Saul's three thousand men would be of little use against the light-footed outlaw and his troop. The whole district is seamed with ravines, and these are honeycombed with great caverns, where dangerous outcasts still lurk and defy capture. Travellers go into raptures over the beauty of some of these 'fairy grottoes' draped with maiden-hair fern, cool and moist, and blessedly dark after the fierce light outside. In some one of these the beautiful story which makes our lesson occurred.

I. We have the scene in the cave. The interior would be black as night to one looking inward with eyes fresh from the blinding glare of such sunlight upon limestone, but it would hold a glimmering twilight for one looking outward, with eyes accustomed to the gloom. David and his men, keeping close to the walls and hiding behind angles, might well be unobserved by Saul at the mouth, and probably never looking in at all. How vividly the whispered eagerness of the outcasts round David is reproduced! They think it would be 'tempting Providence' to let such a chance slip. They put a religious varnish on their advice. It would be almost impious not to kill Saul, for here was the hand of God evidently fulfilling a prophecy! There may have been some unrecorded prediction of the sort which they seem to quote; but more probably they are only referring to David's designation to the crown, which they had come to know. It never struck them as possible that it could 'seem good' to a wise man not to cut his enemy's throat when he could do it without danger to himself. So they would watch David stealing down quietly to the place where the unconscious king was crouching, and getting close behind him, knife in hand. How disgusted they must have been when the blade, that flashed for a moment in the light at the cave's mouth, was not buried in Saul's great back, but only hacked off the end of his robe spread out behind him! No personal animosity was in David. However he had been driven to consort with outlaws, and to live a kind of freebooter's life, his natural sweetness was unspoiled, and was reinforced by solemn veneration for the sanctity of the Lord's anointing, which he reverenced all the more because himself had received it. He clambered back to his disappointed men, and, as soon as he was up in the dark again, his chivalry and his religion made him ashamed of his coarse practical jest. The humour of the thing had tempted him to do it; but it was a rude insult, which lowered him more than it did Saul, and, like a true man, he blushes there in the gloom at what he has done. Then he has to defend himself to his men for not coming up to their expectations, and he does it by insisting on the sacredness which still surrounded Saul as 'the Lord's anointed.' David knew that the unhappy king had been rejected and forsaken by 'the Spirit of the Lord,' and that he himself was the true bearer of the regal unction; but he will not take the law into his own hands, and still regards Saul as his 'lord.' He sets the example, much needed by us all, of leaving God to carry out His purposes at His own time, and patiently waiting till that time comes. He had hard work to keep his men from rushing down on the king; but, having commanded himself, is able to restrain them. How many virtues may be in exercise in one action! Here we have generosity, clemency, sensitiveness of conscience, reverence, self-abnegation, patience, loyalty, firmness, sway over lower natures for high ends,—a whole constellation shining star-like in the dark cavern.

II. We have, next, David's pathetic remonstrance. Saul was alone, and David could easily escape among the cliffs, if the king summoned his men; but he risks capture, in the gush of ancient friendship. His words are full of nobleness, and his silence is no less so. He has no reproaches, no anger nor hate. He will not even suppose that Saul has followed his own impulses in his persecution, but assumes that he has been led astray by calumnies. He points to the fragment of Saul's robe in his hand as the disproof of the lie that he had designs against him, and passionately asserts his innocence now and in all the past. He compares himself to some timid wild thing, like one of the goats among the cliffs, and Saul to a hunter. He solemnly calls God to judge between them, and appeals from the slanders and misjudgings of men to the perfect tribunal of God, to whom he commits his cause. He abjures all intention of striking at Saul in his own defence. He quotes, in true Eastern manner, a scrap of proverbial wisdom, which contains the homely truth that character determines action; for it needs a wicked man to do a wicked thing, and he implies that he is not wicked, and that Saul knows that well enough,—by what has just happened, if by nothing else. Then he puts his own insignificance and the disproportion between him and his ragged band and the imposing force of Saul in vivid light by his half-humorous and wholly humble description of himself as a 'dead dog,' and a 'flea'; as harmless as the one, as hard to catch as the other, as little important as either. Finally, he reiterates his devout reference of the whole cause to God, and his fixed resolution to take no steps to right himself, but to leave all to Him.

So ought we to deal with slanders and enmity. The eternal law for us in all opposition and hostility is enshrined in David's noble words and deeds. To repay evil with benefits, to abstain from retaliation when it is in our power, to keep our tongues from bitter and wounding words, to appeal to the adversary's better self, even at the cost of our own 'dignity,'—all that is not easy nor usual among professing Christians. But it ought to be. David's Lord, 'when He suffered, threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously.' We are poor followers of Him, if David surpasses us in patience and magnanimity. It has taken nineteen hundred years to teach us that passive endurance is more heroic than fighting for our own hand, and that repaying scorn and hate with their like is less noble than meeting them with endless forgiveness.

Psalm vii. is all but universally regarded as David's, and as belonging to this period. In it we find a clause, 'I have delivered him that without cause was mine enemy,' which may fairly be supposed to refer to the scene in the cave, and we read the same vehement protestations of innocence, the same figure of himself as a hunted wild animal, the same appeal to God's judgment, as in his remonstrance with Saul. The psalm is the poetic echo of our lesson.

III. We have the momentary melting of Saul's heart. He breaks into passionate weeping. With that sudden flashing out into vehement emotion, so characteristic of him throughout, and, in these latter days of his life, so significant of enfeebled self-control, he recognises David's generous forbearance in its contrast to his own hate, which, for the moment, he feels to be causeless. There is a piteous remembrance of the days when David soothed him by song, in his mention of the sweet 'voice,' and some rekindling of ancient love in his calling him 'My son.' Then follow the sad words which confess the hopelessness of his struggle against the divine purpose, and his appeal for mercy to his house. The picture may well move solemn thoughts and pity for that scathed and solitary soul, seeing for a moment, as by a lightning flash, the madness of his course, and yet held so fast in the grip of his dark passions that he cannot shake off their tyranny.

Two great lessons are taught by that tragic figure of the weeping and yet unchanged king. One is of the power of forbearing gentleness to exorcise hate. The true way to 'overcome evil' is to melt it by fiery coals of gentleness. That is God's way. An iceberg may be crushed to powder, but every fragment is still ice. Only sunshine that melts it will turn it into sweet water. Love is conqueror, and the only conqueror, and its conquest is to transform hate into love.

The other lesson is the worthlessness of mere feeling, which by its very nature passes away, and, like unstored rain, leaves the rock in its obstinate hardness more exposed. Saul only increased his guilt by reason of the fleeting glimpse of his folly which he did not follow up; and our gleams of insight into some sin and madness of ours but add to our responsibility. Emotion which does not lead to action hardens the heart, and adds to our guilt and condemnation.

LOVE AND REMORSE

'And David arose, and came to the place where Saul had pitched: and David beheld the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Ner, the captain of his host: and Saul lay in the trench, and the people pitched round about him. 6. Then answered David and said to Ahimelech the Hittite, and to Abishai the son of Zeruiah, brother to Joab, saying, Who will go down with me to Saul to the camp? And Abishai said, I will go down with thee. 7. So David and Abishai came to the people by night: and, behold, Saul lay sleeping within the trench, and his spear stuck in the ground at his bolster: but Abner and the people lay round about him. 8. Then said Abishai to David, God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day: now therefore let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear even to the earth at once, and I will not smite him the second time. 9. And David said to Abishai, Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless? 10. David said furthermore, As the Lord liveth, the Lord shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle, and perish. 11. The Lord forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the Lord's anointed: but, I pray thee, take thou now the spear that is at his bolster, and the cruse of water, and let us go. 12. So David took the spear and the cruse of water from Saul's bolster; and they gat them away, and no man saw it, nor knew it, neither awaked: for they were all asleep; because a deep sleep from the Lord was fallen upon them. . . . 21. Then said Saul, I have sinned: return, my son David: for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in thine eyes this day: behold, I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly. 22. And David answered and said, Behold the king's spear! and let one of the young men come over and fetch it. 23. The Lord render to every man his righteousness and his faithfulness; for the Lord delivered thee into my hand to-day, but I would not stretch forth mine hand against the Lord's anointed. 24. And, behold, as thy life was much set by this day in mine eyes, so let my life be much set by in the eyes of the Lord, and let Him deliver me out of all tribulation. 25. Then Saul said to David, Blessed be thou, my son David: thou shalt both do great things, and also shalt still prevail. So David went on his way, and Saul returned to his place.'—1 Samuel xxvi. 5-12; 21-25.

It is fashionable at present to regard this incident and the other instance of David's sparing Saul, when in his power, as two versions of one event. But it is not improbable that the hunted outlaw should twice have taken refuge in the same place, or that his hiding-place should have been twice betrayed. He had but a small choice of safe retreats, and the Ziphites had motive for a second betrayal in the fact of the first, and of its failure to secure David's capture. The whole cast of the two incidents is so different that it is impossible to see how the one could have been evolved from the other, and either they are both true, or they are both unhistorical, or, at best, are both the product of fancy working on, and arbitrarily filling up, a very meagre skeleton of fact. Many of the advocates of the identity of the incident at the bottom of the two accounts would accept the latter explanation; we take the former.

Saul had three thousand men with him; David had left his little troop 'in the wilderness,' and seems to have come with only his two companions, Ahimelech and his own nephew, Abishai, to reconnoitre. He sees, from some height, the camp, with the transport wagons making a kind of barricade in the centre—just as camps are still arranged in South Africa and elsewhere,—and Saul established therein as in a rude fortification. A bold thought flashes into his mind as he looks. Perhaps he remembered Gideon's daring visit to the camp of Midian. He will go down, and not only into the camp, but 'to Saul,' through the ranks and over the barrier. What to do he does not say, but the two fierce fighters beside him think of only one thing as sufficient motive for such an adventure. Abishai volunteers to go with him; no doubt Ahimelech would have been ready also, but two were enough, and three would only have increased risk. So they lay close hid till night fell, and then stole down through the sleeping ranks with silent movements, like a couple of Indians on the war-trail, climbed the barricade, and stood at last where Saul lay, with his spear, as the emblem of kingship, stuck upright at his head, and a cruse of water for slaking thirst, if he awoke, beside him. Those who should have been his guards lay sleeping round him, for a 'deep sleep from Jehovah was fallen upon them.' What a vivid, strange picture it is, and how characteristic of the careless discipline of unscientific Eastern warfare!

The tigerish lust for blood awoke in Abishai. Whatever sad, pitying, half-tender thoughts stirred in David as he looked at the mighty form of Saul, with limbs relaxed in slumber, and perhaps some of the gloom and evil passions charmed out of his face, his nephew's only thought was, 'What a fair mark! what an easy blow!' He was brutally eager to strike once, and truculently sure that his arm would make sure that once would be enough. He was religious too, after a strange fierce fashion. God—significantly he does not say 'Jehovah'; his religion was only the vague belief in a deity—had delivered Saul into David's hands, and it would be a kind of sin not to kill him. How many bloody tragedies that same unnatural alliance of religion and murderous hate has varnished over! Very beautifully does David's spirit contrast with this. Abishai represents the natural impulse of us all—to strike at our enemies when we can, to meet hate with hate, and do to another the evil that he would do to us.

David here, though he could be fierce and cruel enough sometimes, and had plenty of the devil in him, listens to his nobler self, which listens to God, and, at a time when everything tempted him to avenge himself, resists and overcomes. He is here a saint after the New Testament pattern. Abishai had, in effect.

said, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy.' David's finely-tuned ear heard, long before they were spoken on earth, the great Christian words, 'I say unto you, Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you.' He knew that Saul had been 'rejected,' but he was 'Jehovah's anointed,' and the unction which had rested on that sleeping head lingered still. It was not for David to be the executor of God's retribution. He left himself and his cause in Jehovah's hands, and no doubt it was with sorrow and pitying love, not altogether quenched by Saul's mad hate, that he foresaw that the life which he spared now was certain one day to be smitten. We may well learn the lesson of this story, and apply it to the small antagonisms and comparatively harmless enmities which may beset our more quiet lives. David in Saul's 'laager,' Stephen outside the wall, alike lead up our thoughts to Jesus' prayer, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.'

The carrying off of the spear and the cruse was a touch of almost humour, and it, with the ironical taunt flung across the valley to Abner, gives relief to the strain of emotion in the story. Saul's burst of passionate remorse is morbid, paroxysmal, like his fits of fury, and is sure to foam itself away. The man had no self-control. He had let wild, ungoverned moods master him, and was truly 'possessed.' One passion indulged had pushed him over the precipice into insanity, or something like it. Let us take care not to let any passion, emotion, or mood get the upper hand. 'That way madness lies.' 'He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, without walls.'

And let us not confound remorse with repentance

'The sorrow of the world worketh death.' Saul grovelled in agony that day, but to-morrow he was raging again with more than the old frenzy of hate. Many a man says, 'I have played the fool,' and yet goes on playing it again when the paroxysm of remorse has stormed itself out. David's answer was by no means effusive, for he had learned how little Saul's regrets were to be trusted. He takes no notice of the honeyed words of invitation to return, and will not this time venture to take back the spear and cruse, as he had done, on the previous occasion, the skirt of Saul's robe. He solemnly appeals to Jehovah's righteous judgment to determine his and Saul's respective 'righteousness and faithfulness.' He is silent as to what that judgment may have in reserve for Saul, but for himself he is calmly conscious that, in the matter of sparing Saul's life, he has done right, and expects that God will deliver him 'out of all tribulation.' That is not self-righteous boasting, although it does not exactly smack of the Christian spirit; but it is faith clinging to the confidence that God is 'not unrighteous to forget' his servant's obedience, and that the innocent will not always be the oppressor's victim.

What a strange, bewildered, self-contradictory chaos of belief and intention is revealed in poor, miserable Saul's parting words! He blesses the man whom he is hunting to slay. He knows that all his wild efforts to destroy him are foredoomed to failure, and that David 'shall surely prevail'; and yet he cannot give up fighting against the inevitable,—that is, against God. How many of us are doing the very same thing—rushing on in a course of life which we know, when we are sane, to be dead against God's will, and therefore doomed to utter collapse some day!

SAUL

'And Saul answered, I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me.'—1 SAMUEL xxviii. 15.

AMONG all the persons of Scripture who are represented as having fallen away from God and wrecked their lives, perhaps there is none so impressive as the giant form of the first king of Israel. Huge and black, seamed and scarred with lightning marks of passions, moody and suspicious, devil-ridden and lonely, doubting his truest friends, and even his son, striking blindly in his fury at the gracious, sunny poet-warrior who shows so bright, so full of resource, so nimble, so generous, by contrast with the heavy strength of the moody giant, and ever escapes the javelin that quivers harmlessly in the wall, with an inevitable destiny hanging over his head, and at last creeping to 'wizards that peep and mutter,' and dying a suicide, with his army in full flight and his son dead at his feet—what a course and what an end for the chosen of the Lord, on whom the Spirit of the Lord came with the anointing oil, and gave him a new heart for his kingly office.

I know not anywhere a sadder story: and I know not where human lips ever poured out a more awful wail—like a Titan in his rage of pain—than these words of our text. Bright hopes and fair promise, and much that was good and true in performance—all came to this. A few hours more and the 'battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him, and he was greatly distressed by reason of the archers.' Madness, despair, defeat, death, all were the sequel of, 'Because thou hast rejected the commandment of the Lord, the Lord hath also rejected thee from being king.' A true soul's tragedy! Let us look together at its course, and gather the lessons that lie on the surface. We have neither space nor wish here to enter upon the many points of minute interest and curiosity which are in the story. We have to be contented with large outlines.

Look then

I. At the bright dawn.

The early story gives us many traits of beauty in Saul's character. Not only physical strength but a winning personality are apparent. His modesty and humility when Samuel salutes him are made plain. And we are distinctly told that as he turned away from Samuel, 'God gave him another heart,' by which we are to understand not 'regeneration' but an inspiration, that equipped him for his office.

How many a man finds that sudden elevation ruins him! But often it evokes what is good, brings an entire change of disposition, as with 'Harry of Monmouth.' But it was not only his new responsibility which brought into action powers that had previously been dormant. New circumstances, no doubt, did something, but Saul's 'new' heart was God's gift.

The story of the beginning of his reign reveals a very noble and lovable character. We can but mention his modesty in hiding among the stuff, his disregard of the murmurs of those who would not do homage ('made as though he had been deaf'), his return, as it would seem, to his home-life and farm-work, his chivalrous boldness and warlike energy, which sprung at once to activity on the call of a great exigency in Jabesh-Gilead, his humane and sweet repression of the people's desire, in their first flush of pride in their soldier king, to slay his enemies, and his devout acknowledgment that not he but God has wrought this salvation.

So for the first year of his reign all went well.

How much of divine influence a man may have and yet fling it all away! How unreliable a thing mere natural goodness is! How much apparent goodness may coexist with deep-seated evil! How bright a beginning may darken into a tempestuous day! How seeds of evil may lurk in the fairest character! How little one can be judged by part of his life! How it is not the possession, but the retention, of goodness and devout impressions that makes a man good.

II. The gathering clouds.

The acts recorded as darkening the fair dawn of Saul's reign may seem too trivial to deserve the stern retribution that followed them, but small acts may be great sins. The first of them was his offering sacrifices without authority, an act which Samuel stigmatised as wanton, deliberate disobedience to 'the commandment of the Lord thy God.' Next came his rash and absurd laying of a curse on any soldier who should eat food before evening, and his consequent mad determination to kill Jonathan, for 'taking a little honey' on the end of his rod. Next came his flagrant disobedience to the divine command transmitted to him through Samuel, to 'smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not.' We shudder at such ferocious extermination, but we are to remember that Saul was moved by no pity, but by mere lust for loot, and tried to deceive God, in the person of His representative Samuel, by the lie that the people had coerced him, and that the motive for preserving the best of the cattle was to sacrifice them to the Lord. Samuel's blaze of indignation gave the world the great word: 'Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice.'

Putting all these acts together, we have the sad picture of a character steadily deteriorating. He is growing daily more self-willed and impatient of the restraint of God's commanding will. He is chafing at his position as a viceroy, not an absolute sovereign. He is becoming tyrannical, careless of his subjects' lives, intolerant of opposition, remonstrance, or advice. The tragedy of his decadence is summed up in Samuel's stern word: 'Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected thee from being king.'

Trivial acts may show great and deep-seated evil. A small swelling under the arm-pit is the sign of the plague and the precursor of swift death.

The master-sin is disobedience, self-willed departure from God. That disobedience may be as virulently active in a trifle as in a deed that men call great. Self-will is the tap root of all sin, however labyrinthine the outgrowth from it.

Disobedience honeycombs a soul. The attractive early traits in Saul's character slowly perhaps but steadily, disappeared. The fair morning sky was heavy with thunder-clouds by midday, and they all began with a light fleecy film that none noticed at first.

III. The long eclipse.

'An evil spirit from the Lord troubled him, and the Spirit of God departed from him.'

Modern psychologists would call Saul's case an instance of insanity brought about by indulgence in passion and self-will. Is there any reason why the deeper, more religious explanation should not be united with the scientific one? Does not God work in the working of 'natural' phenomena?

What we nowadays call insanity is not very far off from a man who habitually indulges in passionate self-will, and spurns God from any authority over his life.

What were Saul's characteristics now? The story tells of bursts of ungovernable fury, of unslumbering and universal suspicions, of utter misery, seeing enemies everywhere and complaining, 'None of you hath pity upon me,' of ferocious cruelty and gloomy despair, of paroxysms of agonising but transient remorse.

It is an awful picture, and it grimly teaches lessons that we shall be wise to write deeply on our hearts.

What a ruin a man makes of himself!

How hideous a godless soul is!

What unhappiness is certain if we dismiss God from ruling our lives!

How useless remorse is unless it leads to repentance!

IV. The stormy sunset.

The scene at Endor makes one's flesh creep. No more tragic picture of failure and despair was ever painted. The greatest dramatists, whose creations move the terror and pity of the world, have imagined no more heart-touching figure.

It matters very little—nothing at all in fact—either for the dramatic force or for the religious impressiveness of the scene, whether the woman 'brought up' Samuel, or whether she was as much awed as Saul was, by the coming up of 'an old man' covered with the well-known 'mantle.' The boding prophecy of to-morrow's defeat and death filled yet fuller the cup that had seemed to be already full of all misery. And that collapse of strength in the huddled figure, prostrate in the witch's den, may well stand for a prophecy of what will be the upshot at the last of a self-will that boasts of its own power, and tries to shake off dependence on God.

WHAT DOEST THOU HERE?

'Then said the princes of the Philistines, What do these Hebrews here?'—1 SAMUEL xxix. 3.

'The word of the Lord came to him, and He said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?'—1 KINGS xix. 9.

I HAVE put these two verses together, not only because of their identity in form, though that is striking, but because they bear upon one and the same subject, as will appear, if, in a word or two, I set each of them in its setting. David was almost at the lowest point of his fortunes when he fled into foreign territory, and for awhile took service under one of the kings of the Philistines. He served him faithfully, and so, when the last great fight, in which Saul lost his life, was about to be waged between Philistia and Israel, David and his men came as a contingent to the army of the former. The Philistine commanders, very naturally, were suspicious of these allies, just as Englishmen would have been if, on the night before Waterloo, a brigade of Frenchmen had deserted and offered their help to fight Napoleon. So the question 'What do these Hebrews here?'—amongst our ranks—was an extremely natural one, and it was answered in the only possible way, by the subsequent departure of David and his men from the unnatural and ill-omened alliance.

Now, that suggests to us that Christian people are out of their places, even in the eyes of worldly people, when they are fighting shoulder to shoulder with them in certain causes; and it suggests the propriety of keeping apart. 'Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord.' 'What do these Hebrews here?' is a question that Philistia often asks.

But now turn to the other question. Elijah had fallen into the mood of depression which so often follows great nervous tension. He had just offered the sacrifice on Carmel, and brought all Israel back to the Lord, and Jezebel had flamed out and threatened his life. The usually undaunted prophet, in the reaction after his great effort, was fearful for his life and deserted his work, flung himself into solitude and shook the dust off his feet against Israel. Was that not just doing what I have been saying that Christian people ought to do—separating himself from the world? In a sense, yes, but the voice came, 'What dost thou here, Elijah?' 'Go back to your work; to Ahab, to Jezebel. Go back to death if need be. Do not shirk your duty on the pretence of separating yourself from the world.'

So we put the two questions together. They limit one another, and they suggest the *via media*, the course between, and lead me to say one or two plain things about that duty of Christian separation from an evil world.

I. The first thing that I would suggest to you is the inevitable intermingling, which is the law of God, and therefore can never be broken with impunity.

Christ's parable about the Kingdom of Heaven in the world being like a man that sowed good seed in his field, which sprung up intermingled with tares, contains the lesson, not so much of the purity or non-purity of the Church as of the inseparable intertwining in the world of Christian people with others. The roots are matted together, and you cannot pull up a tare without danger of pulling up a wheat-stalk that has got interlaced with it. That is but to say that Society at present, and the earthly form of the Kingdom of God, are not organised on the basis of religious affinity, but upon a great many other things, such as family, kindred, business, a thousand ties of all sorts which mat men together, and make it undesirable, impossible, contrary to God's intention, that the good people should club themselves together, and leave the bad ones to rot and stink. The two are meant to be in close contact. 'Let both grow together till the harvest.' If any Christian man were to do as the monks of old did, fly into solitude to look after his own soul, then the question which came to Elijah would be suitable to him, 'What doest thou here?' Is there not work enough for you out there, in that wicked world? Is that not the place for you? Where is the place for the 'salt'? Where the meat is in danger of putrefaction. Rub it in! That is what it was meant for. 'Ye are the light of the world.' That suggests the picture of a lamp upon a pedestal that it may send out its rays, but itself remains apart. But the companion metaphor suggests the closest possible contact, and such contact is duty for us Christian people. Elijah ran away from his work. There are types of Christian life to-day unwholesomely self-engrossed, and too much occupied with their own spiritual condition, to realise and discharge the duty of witnessing in the world. Wherever you find a Christian man—whether he is a monk with bare foot, and a rope round his brown robe, and shaven head, or whether he is in the garb of modern Protestantism—that tries more to keep himself apart, in the enjoyment and cultivation of his own religious life, than to fling himself into the midst of the world's worst evil, in order to fight and to cure it, you get a man who is sharing in Elijah's transgression, and needs Elijah's rebuke. The intermingling is inevitable in the present state of things; and family, kindred, business, social and political movements, all require that Christian people should work side by side with men who are not possessors of 'like precious faith.' If ever there have been individuals or communities that have tried to traverse that law, they have developed narrowness and bitterness and stunted growth, and a hundred evils that we all know.

II. And now let me say a word about the second thing, and that is—the imperative separation.

'What do these Israelites here?' is the question. Much of all our lives lies outside these necessary connections with the world, of which I have been speaking. And the question for each of us is, What do we do when we are left to do as we like? Where do we go? When the iron weight fastened by the bit of string is taken off the sapling, it starts back to its original uprightness. Is that what your Christianity does for you? When you are left to yourself, when you have done all the work that is required, and you are free, where do you turn naturally? It is of no use to lay down special regulations. There has been far too much regulation and red-tape in our Christianity all along. Do not let us put so much stress upon individual acts. Let us look at the spirit. Whither do I turn? What do I like to do? Who are my chosen companions? What are my recreations? Is my life of such a sort as that the world will point to me, and say, 'What! you here! a professing Christian; what are you doing here?'

I remember that in the autobiography of Mr. Spurgeon, there is a story told about what he did when a child, and living with his grandfather, the pastor of a little country church. There was a very prominent member of that church who was in the habit of going into the public-house occasionally; and the small boy stepped into the sanded parlour where this inconsistent man was sitting, walked up to him, and said, 'What doest thou here, Elijah?' It was the turning-point of the man's life. That is the question that I desire us all to ask ourselves—where do we go, and what sort of lives do we live in the moments when our own voluntary choice determines our action?

'A man is known by the company he keeps,' says an old Latin proverb, and I am bound to say that I do not think that it is a good sign of the depth of a Christian professor's religion if he feels himself more at home in the company of people who do not share his religion than in the company of those that do. I do not wish to be strait-laced and narrow, but I do not wish, either, to be so broad as to obliterate altogether the distinction between Christian people and others. The fact of the case is this, dear friends; if we are Christ's servants we have more in common with the most uncongenial Christians than we have with the most congenial man who is not a Christian. And if we were nearer our Master we should feel that it was so. 'Being let go they went to their own company.' Where do you go when you can make your choice?

I am not going to speak in detail about occupations or recreations. I can quite believe that the theatre might be made an instrument of morality. I can quite believe that a race-course might be a perfectly innocent place. I can quite believe that there may be no harm in a dance. All that I say is that there are two questions which every Christian professor ought to ask himself about such subjects. One is, Can I ask God to bless this thing, and my doing it? And the other is, Does this help or hinder my religion? If we will take these two questions with us as tests of conduct and companionship, I do not think that we shall go far wrong, either in the choice of our companions, or in the choice of our surroundings of any kind, or in the choice of our recreations and our occupations. But if we do not, then I am quite sure that we shall go wrong in them all. 'What communion hath light with darkness?' 'What agreement hath the temple of God with idols? Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord.'

The main question is, do I grasp the aim of life with clearness and decision as being to make myself by God's help such a character as God has pleasure in? If I do I shall regulate all these things thereby.

III. Now there is one last suggestion that I wish to make, and that is the double questioning that we shall have to stand.

The lords of the Philistines said, 'What do these Hebrews here?' They saw the inconsistency, if David and his men did not. They were sharp to detect it, and David and his band did not rise in their opinion, but decidedly went down, when they saw them marching there, in such an unnatural place as 'behind Achish,' and ready to flesh their swords in the blood of their brethren. So let me tell you, you will neither recommend your religion nor yourselves to men of the world, by inconsistently trying to identify yourselves with them. There are a great many professing Christians nowadays whose mouths are full of the word 'liberality,' and who seem to try to show how absolutely identical with a godless man's a God-fearing one's life may be made. Do you think that the world respects that type of Christian, or regards his religion as the kind of thing to be admired? No; the question that they fling at such people is the question which David was humiliated by having pitched at his head—'What do these Hebrews here?' 'Let them go back to their mountains. This is no place for *them.*' The world respects an out-and-out Christian; but neither God nor the world respects an inconsistent one.

But there is another question, and another Questioner—'What doest thou here, Elijah?' God did not ask Elijah the question because he did not know the answer; but because he wished to make Elijah put his mood into words, since then Elijah would understand it a little better, and, when he found the tremendous difficulty of making a decent excuse, would begin to suspect that the conduct that wanted so much glozing was not exactly the conduct fit for a prophet. And so let us think that God is looking down upon us, in all our occupation of our free time, and that He is wishing us to put into words what we are about, and why we are where we are.

What do you think you would say if, in some of these moments of unnecessary intermingling with questionable things and doubtful people, you were brought suddenly to this, that you had to formulate into some kind of plausibility your reason for being there? I am afraid it would be a very lame and ragged set of reasons that many of us would have to give. Well! better that we should now have to answer the question 'What doest thou here?' than that we should have to fail in answering the future question, after we have done with the world: 'What didst thou there?'

Dear brethren, let us cleave to Christ, and that will separate us from the world. If we cleave to the world, that will separate us from Christ. I do not insist on details of conduct, but I do beseech you, professing Christians, to recognise that you are set in the world in order to grow like your Master, and that their tendency to help you to that likeness is the one test of all occupations, recreations, and companionships, by which we may know whether we are in or out of the place that pleases Him. And if we are in it, that blessed hope which is held forth in the parable to which I have already referred, will come full of sweetness and of strength to us, that, yonder, men will be grouped according to their moral and religious character; that the tares will be taken away from the wheat, and, that as Christ says, 'Then shall the righteous flame as the sun in their heavenly Father's Kingdom.'

THE SECRET OF COURAGE

'But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.'—1 SAMUEL xxx. 6.

DAVID was at perhaps the very lowest ebb of his fortunes. He had long been a wandering outlaw, and had finally been driven, by Saul's persistent hostility, to take refuge in the Philistines' country. He had gathered around himself a band of desperate men, and was living very much like a freebooter. He had found refuge in a little city of the Philistines, far down in the South, from which he and his men had marched as a contingent in the Philistine army, which was preparing an attack upon Saul. But, naturally, the Philistine soldiers doubted their ally, and he was obliged to take himself and his troops back again to their temporary home.

When he came there it was a heap of smoking ruins.

Everything was gone; property, cattle, wives, children—and all was desolation. His turbulent followers rose against him, a mutiny broke out—a dangerous thing amongst such a crew—and they were ready to stone him. And at that moment what did he do? Nothing. Was he cast down? No. Was he agitated? No. 'But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.'

Now the first thing I notice is

I. The grand assurance which this man gripped fast at such a time.

It is not by accident, nor is it a mere piece of tautology, that we read 'the Lord *his* God.' For, if you will remember, the very keynote of the psalms which are ascribed to David is just that expression, 'My God,' 'My God.' So far as the very fragmentary records of Jewish literature go, it would appear as if David was the very first of all the ancient singers to grapple that thought that he stood in a personal, individual relation to God, and God to him. And so it was *his* God that he laid hold of at that dark hour.

Now I am not putting too much into a little word when I insist upon it that the very essence and nerve of what strengthened David, at that supreme moment of desolation, was the conviction that welled up in his heart that, in spite of it all, he had a grip of God's hand as his very own, and God had hold of him. Just think of the difference between the attitude of mind and heart expressed in the names that were more familiar to the Israelitish people, and this name for Jehovah. 'The God of Israel'—that is wide, general; and a man might use it and yet fail to feel that it implied that each individual of the community stood by himself in a personal relation to God. But David penetrated through the broad, general thought, and got into the heart of the matter. It was not enough for him, in his time of need, to stay himself upon a vague universal goodness, but he had to clasp to his burdened heart the individualising thought, 'the God of Israel is *my* God.'

Think, too, of the contrast of the thoughts and emotions suggested by 'My God,' and by 'the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob.' Great as that name is, it carries the mind away back into the past, and speaks of a historical relation in former days, which may or may not continue in all its tenderness and sweetness and power into the prosaic present. But when a man feels, not only 'the God of Jacob is our Refuge,' but, 'the God of Jacob is my God,' then the whole thing flashes up into new power. 'My sun'—will one man claim property in that great luminary that pours its light down on the whole world? Yes.

> 'The sun whose beams most glorious are,
> Disdaineth no beholder,'

as the old song has it. Each man's eye receives the straight impact of its universal beams. It is my sun, though it be the light that lightens all men that come into the world. 'My atmosphere'—will one man claim the free, unappropriated winds of heaven as his? Yes, for they will pour into his lungs; and yet his brother will be none the poorer.

I would not go the length of saying that the living realisation, in heart and mind, of this personal possession of God is the difference between a traditional and vague profession of religion and a vital possession of religion, but if it is not the difference, it goes a long way towards explaining the difference. The man who contents himself with the generality of a Gospel for the world, and who can say no more than that Jesus Christ died for all, has yet to learn the most intimate sweetness, and the most quickening and transforming power, of that Gospel, and he only learns it when he says, 'Who loved *me*, and gave Himself for *me*.'

So do not let us be content with saying, 'the God of Israel,' and its many thousands, or 'the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob,' who filled the past with His lustre, but let us bring the general good into our own houses, as men might draw the waters of Niagara into their homes through pipes, and let us cry: 'My Lord and my God!' 'David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.'

II. Now note, secondly, the sufficiency of this one conviction and assurance.

Here is one of the many eloquent 'buts' of the Bible. On the one hand is piled up a black heap of calamities, loss, treachery and peril; and opposed to them is only that one clause: 'But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.' There was only one possession in all the world, except his body and the clothes that he stood in, that he could call his own at that moment. Everything else was gone; his property was carried off by raiders, his home was smouldering embers. But the Amalekites had not stolen God from him. Though he could no longer say, 'My house, my city, my possessions,' he could say, 'My God.' Whatever else we lose, as long as we have Him we are rich; and whatever else we possess, we are poor as long as we have not Him. God is enough; whatever else may go. The Lord his God was the sufficient portion for this man when he stood a homeless pauper. He had lost everything that his heart clung to; wives, children; Abigail and Abinoam were captives in the arms of some Amalekites; his house was left to him desolate; his heart was bleeding. 'But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God,' and the bleeding heart was stanched, and the yearning for some one to love and be loved by was satisfied, when he turned himself from the desolation of earth to the riches in the heavens. He was standing on the edge of possible death, for his followers were ready to stone him. He had come through many perils in the past, but he had never been nearer a fatal end than he was at that moment. But the thought of the undying Friend lifted him buoyantly above the dread of death, and he could look with an unwinking eye right into the fleshless eye-sockets of the skeleton, and say, 'I fear no evil, for Thou art with me.'

So for poverty, loss, the blasting of earthly hopes, the crushing of earthly affections, the extremity of danger, and the utmost threatening of death, here is the sufficient remedy—that one mighty assurance: 'The Lord is my God.' For if He is 'the strength of my heart,' He will be 'my portion for ever.' He is not poor who has God for his, nor does he wander with a hungry heart who can rest his heart on God's; nor need he fear death who possesses God, and in Him eternal life.

So, brethren, in all our changing circumstances, there is more than enough for us in that sweet, simple, strong thought. The end of sorrow (that is to say, the purpose thereof) is to breed in us the conviction that God is ours, to drive us to Him by lack of all beside; and the end of sorrow (that is to say, the termination thereof) is the kindling in our hearts of the light of that blessed assurance, for with Him we shall fear no evil. You never know the good of the breakwater until the storm is rolling the waves against its outer side. Light a little candle in a room, and you will not see the lightning when it flashes outside, however stormy the sky, and seamed with the fiery darts. If we have God in our hearts, we have enough for courage and for strength.

I need not remind you, I suppose, how this darkest moment of David's fortunes was the moment at which the darkness broke. Three days after this *émeute* of his turbulent followers, there came a fugitive into the camp with news that Saul was dead and David was king. So it was not in vain that he had 'strengthened himself in the Lord his God.' Our 'light affliction which is but for a moment' leads on to a manifestation of the true power of God our Friend, and to the breaking of the day.

III. And now the last thing to be noted is the effort by which this assurance is attained and sustained.

The words of the original convey even more forcibly than those of our translation the thought of David's own action in securing him the hold of God as his. He 'strengthened *himself* in the Lord his God.' The Hebrew conveys the notion of effort, persistent and continuous; and it tells us this, that when things are as black as they were round David at that hour—it is not a matter of course, even for a good man, that there shall well up in his heart this tranquillising and victorious conviction; but he has to set himself to reach and to keep it. God will give it, but He will not give it unless the man strains after it. David 'strengthened himself in the Lord,' and if he had not doggedly set about resisting the pressure of circumstances, and flinging himself as it were, by an effort, into the arms of God, circumstances would have been too strong for him, and despair would have shrouded his soul. In the darkest moment it is possible for a man to surround himself with God's light, but even in the brightest it is not possible to do so unless he makes a serious effort.

That effort must consist mainly in two things. One is that we shall honestly try to occupy our minds, as well as our hearts, with the truth which certifies to us that God is, in very deed, ours. If we never think, or think languidly and rarely, about what God has revealed to us, by the word and life and death and intercession of Jesus Christ, concerning Himself, His heart of love towards us, and His relations to us, then we shall not have, either in the time of disaster or of joy, the blessed sense that He is indeed ours. If a man will not think about Christian truth he will not have the blessedness of Christian possession of God. There is no mystery about the road to the sweetness and holiness and power that may belong to a Christian. The only way to win them is to be occupied, far more than most of us are, with the plain truths of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. If you never think about them they cannot affect you, and they will not make you sure that God is yours.

But we cannot occupy ourselves with these truths unless we have a distinct and resolute purpose running through our lives, of averting our eyes from the things that might make us lose sight of them and of Him. David had his choice. He could either, as a great many of us do, stand there and look, and look, and look, and see nothing but his disasters, or he could look past them; and see beyond them God. Peter had his choice whether he would look at the water, or whether he would look at Jesus Christ. He chose to look at the water; 'and when he saw the wind boisterous he began to sink'—of course and when he looked at Christ and cried: 'Lord, save me!' he was held up—equally of course. Make the effort not to let the sorrowful things, or the difficult things, or the fearful things, or the joyous things, in your life, absorb you, but turn away, and, as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, in another connection, 'look off unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith.' David had to put constraint upon himself, to admit any other thoughts into his mind than those that were pressed into it by the facts before his eyes; but he put on the constraint, and so he was encouraged because he encouraged himself.

There is another thing which we have to make an effort to do, if we would have the blessedness of this conviction filling and flooding our hearts. For the possession is reciprocal; we say, 'My God,' and He says, 'My people.' Unless we yield ourselves to Him and say, 'I am Thine,' we shall never be able to say, 'Thou art mine.' We must recognise His possession of us; we must yield ourselves; we must obey; we must elect Him as our chief good, we must feel that we are not our own, but bought with a price. And then when we look up into the heavens thus submissive, thus obedient, thus owning His authority and His rights, as well as claiming His love and His tenderness, and cry: 'My Father,' He will bend down and whisper into our hearts: 'Thou art My beloved son.' Then we shall be 'strong, and of a good courage,' however weak and timid, and we shall be rich, though, like David, we have lost all things.

AT THE FRONT OR THE BASE

'As his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff.'—1 SAMUEL xxx. 24.

DAVID's city of Ziklag had been captured by the Amalekites, while he and all his men who could carry arms were absent, serving in the army of Achish, the Philistine king of Gath. On their return they found ruin, their homes harried, their wives, children, and property carried off. Wearied already with their long march, they set off at once in pursuit of the spoilers, who had had a long start of them. When they reached the brook Besor, two hundred of them were too weary and footsore to ford it, and so had to be left behind. But these were not useless, for the heavy baggage was left in their charge, and the other four hundred were thus enabled to march more lightly, and therefore more swiftly. They picked up a sick slave, whom his Amalekite master had heartlessly abandoned to die on the 'veldt.' He was almost dead, so they fed him, and when he was able to answer, questioned him. He undertook to guide David and his band, and thus, as twilight was beginning to fall and the Amalekites were 'spread abroad over all the ground, eating and drinking and feasting because of all the great spoil that they had taken,' the four hundred burst on them, routed them utterly, and won back all their goods and much more.

Then came a quarrel. The four hundred who had gone to the fight insisted that the booty was theirs, and that the two hundred who had had no hand in winning it should have no share in the distribution. But David over-ruled this and laid down a principle of distribution which was adopted as the standing law of Israel—that the soldiers who were actually in the fight and those who stayed behind guarding the baggage, looking after 'the base of operations,' should share alike. It was fair that they should do so, for the two hundred would willingly have been in the thick of battle, and, further, though they did not fight, they helped the fighters, and by guarding the heavy baggage contributed to the victory as really as if they had been in the fray and come out of it with swords dripping with Amalekite blood.

I. God's battle requires two forms of service.

In David's raid, as in every campaign, some of the available strength has to be taken to guard the camp, the place where the supplies are, the base of operations, and pickets and detachments have to be left behind all the way, to keep open the communication. The sword is not more needful than the long train of baggage carts, and the forwarding of supplies to the front is as indispensable to the conduct of the war as the headlong charge.

In every great work there is the same distinction of parts and functions, all co-operating to produce the effect which seems to be entirely due to that cause which happens to come last in the series. Organisation of labour associates many hands in the different stages of the one result. There are very few things in this world which are the product of one simple cause alone. You cannot grow a grain of corn without the seed with its vital germ, the soil with its mysterious influences, the sunshine and the rain, the sower's hand and basket, the plougher's plough, and all these, except the blessed sunshine, are the results of a series of other causes which lie forgotten, but are really represented in the issue. If one of them were struck out, all the rest would be ineffectual. In a great machine all its parts are equally necessary, and a defect in a cog on a wheel would be as fatal as a flaw in the cylinder or a crack in the mighty shaft. What would become of a ship if the pintle that the rudder works on were away? The effect of a whole orchestra may depend on the coming in of the flute at the right place.

So in the work which God has given to the Church to do, there are the two forms of service, the direct and the indirect. There are the fighters and the guards of the baggage. And these two are equally necessary. That without which a great work could not have been done is great. When Luther came out from the Diet of Worms, and a knight clapped him on the shoulder, and said, 'Well done! little monk,' he had a share in the memorable deed of that day. The man who gave Luther a flagon of beer when his lips were dry with speaking there before emperor and cardinals, was included in the promise to the giver 'of a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple.'

We have brethren in Christ who have gone to the front, hazarding their lives on the high places of the field. Their hands will droop if they do not feel that a chain of sympathy stretches between them and us, for they in their solitude need all the strength which the confidence of a multitude at home feeling with them can give. They are powerfully influenced by the tone of feeling among us. When devotion languishes and faith droops here, these will generally pass through the same phases among them. When we are strong and bold, their hearts will be quickened by the pulsations of ours, and their courage heightened by thoughts of those from whom they come. Our disorders, our heresies, our struggles are all reproduced on the mission field. An epidemic here travels thither before long, and the spiritual condition of the Church at home is one of the most powerful means of determining that of the churches abroad. A blight among our vines soon shows itself in the little gardens just reclaimed from the waste.

The fighters need material helps and appliances for their work. The days in which the law for apostles and missionaries was, 'Go forth without purse or scrip,' ended before Jesus said, 'Go ye into all the world.' That condition was solemnly revoked by our Lord Himself, when He said, 'When I sent you forth without purse and scrip and shoes, lacked ye anything? But now he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip.' The fighters' material wants are now to be met by Christ's administration of natural means, even as before they had been met by Christ's administration of supernatural ones. His messengers cannot live, do their work, or extend the kingdom, but by the help of material appliances. Those who 'abide by the stuff' are to organise the commissariat department, and to see that those who are far ahead, among the ranks of the foe, do not want for either food or weapons, and are not left isolated, hemmed in by the enemy, and languishing because they feel that they are forgotten by those who 'live at home at ease.'

There has always been that division of labour. Our Lord Himself 'had need of' many humble instruments as helpers. There were the woman who ministered to His wants, the faithful few whose presence and sympathy were joyful to Him even on the Mount of Transfiguration, and longed for even in the awful solitude of the agony in Gethsemane, the sisters of Bethany whose humble home was His last shelter before the Cross, the owner of the Upper Room, the sad women who prepared sweet spices, the ruler who consecrated his new sepulchre in a garden by His body. Even He, treading the wine-press alone, needed helpers in the background, and, while conquering for us in the awful duel with our enemy, had humble friends who 'tarried by the stuff.' Similarly Paul had his helpers, on whose names he lovingly lingers and has made immortal, a 'Gaius, mine host, and of the whole church,' an 'Epaphroditus, my fellow soldier, who ministered to my wants,' and therefore was a soldier, though he did not fight, an 'Onesiphorus, who oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain.'

But let us remember that these two forms of service which are equally necessary are equally binding on us all, in the measure of our opportunity and capacity. Our performing the indirect is no excuse for our neglecting the direct. The conversion of the world is *our* business and not to be handed over to any society or missionary. No Christian can be only and always a non-combatant, without sin and loss. He is bound to take some share in the actual conflict in one or other of its many parts.

II. Service may be different in kind and one in essence.

The determining element in our actions is their motive. Not what we work in, but what we work for, gives the principle of classification. Not the spots on the skin or the colour of the feathers, but the bony skeleton, is the basis of zoological classification. It is not the size or binding of a book, be it quarto or folio or octavo, be it in leather or cloth or paper covers, but its subject, that settles its place in a catalogue. The

Christian motives of love to Christ, self-sacrifice devotion, love to men, make all deeds the same which have these in them in like strength. It matters not whether the copy of a great picture be in oils or an engraving or a photograph, so long as it *is* a copy. The smallest piece of indirect Christian service may be thus elevated to the same plane as the greatest.

'Mere money-giving' may have in it all these qualities, as truly and in as great a degree, as the deeds of Apostles and martyrs. Remember how Peter puts in one category these two forms of service, as equally flowing from 'the manifold grace of God,' and equally to be exercised as 'good stewards' thereof—'If any man speaketh, speaking as it were the oracles of God; if any man ministereth, ministering as of the strength which God supplieth.' Remember how Paul classes all varieties of service as equally 'gifts according to the grace given to us,' and to be exercised in the same spirit whatever are the difference in their forms: 'or ministry, let us give ourselves to our ministry; or he that teacheth, to his teaching: he that giveth, let him do it with liberality . . he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.'

Let us learn, then, how we ought to help Christian fighters for Christ—as associating ourselves with them and their work by sympathy and sharing in their spirit and motives.

Let us learn how loftily we ought to think of the possible sacredness of the most secular forms of help, and to try thus to consecrate our indirect service.

III. All work done from the same motive will receive the same reward.

None need be startled by the thought that Christian work is rewarded. Essentially, it is not deeds but character that is rewarded. The 'reward' is the possession of God of which such a character is capable, and the consequent blessedness which fills such a soul, and cannot but fill it, and which can be enjoyed by no other. The faithful servant enters into the joy of the Lord; the faithful administrator of his Lord's talents enters on the rule over cities in number the same as the talents. Capacity for service is the result of stewardship rightly administered here, and new opportunities yonder are sure to be provided for new capacities.

God's judgment takes little note of that which men's judgment all but exclusively notes. The conspicuousness or success of a man's deeds is nothing to Him. Differences of power are of no account. It is *faithfulness* that is required in a steward, and it is all the same whether the stewardship is of millions or of farthings. The saints nearest the glory in heaven will not always be the men whose words or deeds fill the pages of Church history and resound through the ages. There will be astounding new principles of nearness and comparative remoteness then.

Christ was repeating what David made a law in Israel, when He said: 'He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward.' Therein He recognises the identity in spiritual stature and motive for service, of the prophet and of his dumb helper, and assures us that those who, in widely different ways but under the guidance of the same spirit and motives, have contributed their respective shares to the one triumphant result shall be associated and equalised in the immortal reward.

So remember that what is necessary in our indirect work, if it is to be thus honoured, is that it should have our devotion, and our love to Jesus and to men, throbbing in it, and that it should be accompanied by direct work, in so far as we have opportunities for that. Money-giving may be made sacred, and by it, exercised in the right spirit, we may 'lay up in store for ourselves a good foundation' and may 'lay hold upon eternal life.'

THE END OF SELF-WILL

'Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in mount Gilboa. 2. And the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons; and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Melchi-shua, Saul's sons. 3. And the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him; and he was sore wounded of the archers. 4. Then said Saul unto his armourbearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me. But his armourbearer would not; for he was sore afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword, and fell upon it. 5. And when his armourbearer saw that Saul was dead, he fell likewise upon his sword, and died with him. 6. So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armourbearer, and all his men, that same day together. 7. And when the men of Israel that were on the other side of the valley, and they that were on the other side Jordan, saw that the men of Israel fled, and that Saul and his sons were dead, they forsook the cities, and fled; and the Philistines came and dwelt in them. 8. And it came to pass on the morrow, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen in mount Gilboa. 9. And they cut off his head, and stripped off his armour, and sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to publish it in the house of their idols, and among the people. 10. And they put his armour in the house of Ashtaroth: and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan. 11. And when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard of that which the Philistines had done to Saul; 12. All the valiant men arose, and went all night, and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and came to Jabesh, and burnt them there. 13. And they took their bones, and buried them under a tree at Jabesh, and fasted seven days.'—1 Samuel xxxi. 1-13.

The story of Saul's tragic last days is broken in two by the account, in chapters xxix. and xxx., of David's fortunate dismissal from the invading army, and his exploits against Amalek. The contrast between the two lives, so closely intertwined and powerful for good and evil on each other, reaches its climax at the end of Saul's. While the one sets in dark thunderclouds, the other is bright with victory. While the fall of Saul lays all northern Israel bleeding at the feet of the enemy, David is sending the spoils of his conquest to the elders of Judah. Saul's headless and dishonoured body hangs rotting in the sun on the walls of Bethshan, while David sits a conqueror in Ziklag. The introduction of the brightness of the two preceding chapters is intended to heighten the darkness that broods over this one, and to deepen the stern teaching of that terrible death. Defeat, desolation, despair, attend to his self-dug grave the unhappy king, whose end teaches us all what comes of self-willed resistance to the law and the Spirit of God. Everything else is subordinated in the narrative to the account of his death. Next to nothing is said about the battle, the very site of which is left obscure. We cannot tell whether it was fought down in the plain by the fountain at Jezreel, where Israel was encamped, according to 1 Samuel xxix. 1, or whether both sides manœuvred and changed their ground, and the decisive struggle was on the slope of Gilboa. In any case, the site was almost identical with that of Gideon's victory, but there was no Gideon in command on that dark day. The language of verse 1 seems to imply that the battle was over and the rout begun before the Israelites reached Gilboa. If so, we have to conceive of a short, hopeless struggle on the plain, and then a rush to the hills for safety, in which Saul and his sons and bodyguard were borne along, but held together, closely followed by the 'red pursuing spear' of the conquerors, fierce with ancestral hate and the memories of defeat. There, on the hillside, stands the towering form of Saul with a little ring of his children and retainers round him, the words he had heard last night in the sorceress' tent unnerving his arm, and many a past crime rising before him, and whispering in his ear,

> 'In the battle think on me,
> And fall thy edgeless sword; despair and die.'

There seems to have been a close encounter with some of the pursuers, and a hand-to-hand fight, in which Jonathan and his two brothers fell, and the rest of the bodyguard were slain or scattered. The prophecy of that mantle-swathed shape last night was in part fulfilled—'To-morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me.' They lay stark at his feet, and he knew that he would soon join them. The last heart that loved him had ceased to beat in Jonathan's noble breast, and his own crimes had slain his sons. Who can paint the storm of contending passions in that lonely black soul? or were they all frozen into the numbness of despair?

But whatever else was in his soul, repentance was not there. He may have been seared by remorse, but he was not softened by penitence, and was fierce and proud in despair as he had been in prosperity. The Revised Version substitutes 'overtook' for 'hit' in verse 3; but Saul's fear 'lest these uncircumcised come' is against that rendering, and the fact that the enemy did not know of his death till next day (v. 8) is a difficulty in the way of accepting it. The word is literally 'found,' and possibly means that the archers recognised him, and were making for him, though, as would appear, from some cause they missed him in the confusion. The other change in the Revised Version, that of 'greatly distressed' for 'sore wounded,' fits the context; and if it be adopted, we have the picture of the unwounded but desperate man, once brave, but now stricken with a panic which opens his lips for his only word. In grim silence he had met the loss of battle, sons, and kingdom; but the proud sense of personal dignity is strong to the end, and he fiercely issues his last command, and embraces death to escape insult. The haughty spirit was unchanged, crushed but the same, unsoftened, and therefore roused to madder defiance of God and man. What an awful last saying for 'the anointed of Jehovah,' and how the overweening self-will and vehemence and passionate pride of his whole life are gathered up in it!

His last command is disobeyed by the trembling armour-bearer, whose very awe makes him disobedient. Did Saul, at that last moment, send a thought to an armour-bearer whom he had had in happier days, and who was to inherit his lost kingdom? The enemy are coming nearer. No time is to be lost if he would escape the savage mutilations and torments which ancient warfare made the portion of captive kings. Not another word passes his lips, but, in the same grim silence, he fixes his sword upright in the ground, and flings himself on its point, and dies. All through his reign no hand had injured him but his own; and, as he lived, so he died, his own undoer and his own murderer. Suicide, the refuge of defeated monarchs and praised by heathen moralists as heroic, was rare in Israel. Saul, Ahithophel, and Judas are the instances of it. The most rudimentary recognition of the truths taught by the Old Testament would prevent it. If Saul had had any faith in God, any submission, any repentance, he could not have finished a life of rebellion by a self-inflicted death, which was itself the very desperation of rebellion. We have not to pronounce on his fate, but his act was a sin of the darkest dye.

Yet note how the narrative abstains from all comment. It neither condemns nor pities, though a profound sense of the tragic eclipse is audible in that summing up in verse 6: 'So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armour-bearer, and all his men (that is, immediate followers or escort), that same day together.' And there they all lay, bloody corpses in the fellowship of death, on the slopes of Gilboa. Where Scripture is silent, it is not our part to speak; but we can scarcely turn from that mighty form, prone by his own rash act, without seeking to learn the lesson of his life and fate. Saul had many noble and lovable qualities, such as bravery, promptitude, in his earlier days modesty and generosity. All these he had by nature, but there is no sign that he ever sought to cultivate his moral character, or to win any grace that did not come naturally to him; nor is there any reason to suppose that religion had ever any strong hold on him. His whole character may be summed up in Samuel's words in announcing his rejection: 'Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as idolatry.' Rebellion persisted in, in spite of all remonstrances and checks, till it becomes master of the whole man, is the keynote of his later years. Before that baleful influence, as before some hot poison wind, all the flowers of good dispositions were burned up, and the bad stimulated to growth. His early virtues disappeared, and passed into their opposites. Modesty became arrogance, and a long course of indulgence in self-will developed cruelty, gloomy suspicion, and passionate anger, and left him the victim and slave of his own causeless hate. He who rebels against God mars his own character. The miserable later years of Saul, haunted and hunted as by a demon by his own indulged and swollen rebellion and unsleeping suspicion, are an example of the sorrows that ever dog sin; and, as he lies there on Gilboa, the terrible saying recurs to our memory: 'He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.'

The remainder of the chapter is occupied with three points, bearing on the solemn tragedy just recorded. First, we have the disastrous effects of it in the complete loss of the northern territories. 'The men . . . that were on the other side of the valley' are the tribes to the north of the great plain; and 'they that were on the other side Jordan' are probably those on the east bank. So thorough was the defeat, especially as Saul and the royal house were slain, that they abandoned their homes, and the Philistines took possession. 'One sinner destroyeth much good.' When Israel's king was madly rebellious, Israel was smitten, and its inheritance diminished.

Next we have the insults to the headless corpses. The Philistines did not know till the following day how complete was their victory. The account in 1 Chronicles x. adds that Saul's head was sent to the temple of Dagon, probably as a kind of effacing of the shame wrought there by the presence of the ark. The false gods had triumphed, as their worshippers thought, and Saul's death was Jehovah's defeat. That apparent victory of the idols and the mocking exultation over the bloody trophy and dinted armour are, to the historian, not the least bitter consequences of the battle.

The last point is the brave midnight march of the men of Jabesh from their home on the eastern uplands beyond Jordan, across the river and up to Bethshan, perched on its lofty cliff, and overlooking the valley of the Jordan. It was a requital of Saul's deed in his early bright days, when, with his hastily raised levies, he scattered the Ammonites. It is one gleam of light amid the stormy sunset. There were men ready to hazard their lives even then, because of the noblest of

Saul's acts, which no tyrannical arbitrariness or fierceness of later days had blotted out. So the little band of grateful heroes carried back their ghastly load to Jabesh, and burned the mutilated bodies there, employing an unfamiliar mode, as we may suppose, by reason of their mutilation and decomposition, and then reverently gathering the white bones from the pyre, and laying them below the well-known tamarisk. Saul's one good deed as king sowed seeds of gratitude which flourished again, when the opportunity came. His many evil ones sowed evil seed which bore fatal fruit; and both were seen in his end.

BS491 .M16 1959 v.1
Expositions of Holy Scripture.
Princeton Theological Seminary–Speer Library
1 1012 00059 0259

DATE DUE

~~NOV [illegible] 1993~~

~~JAN 2 1995~~

~~MAR 5 1996~~

~~JUN 3 0 2003~~

DEC 3 1 2004

GAYLORD

PRINTED IN U.S.A.